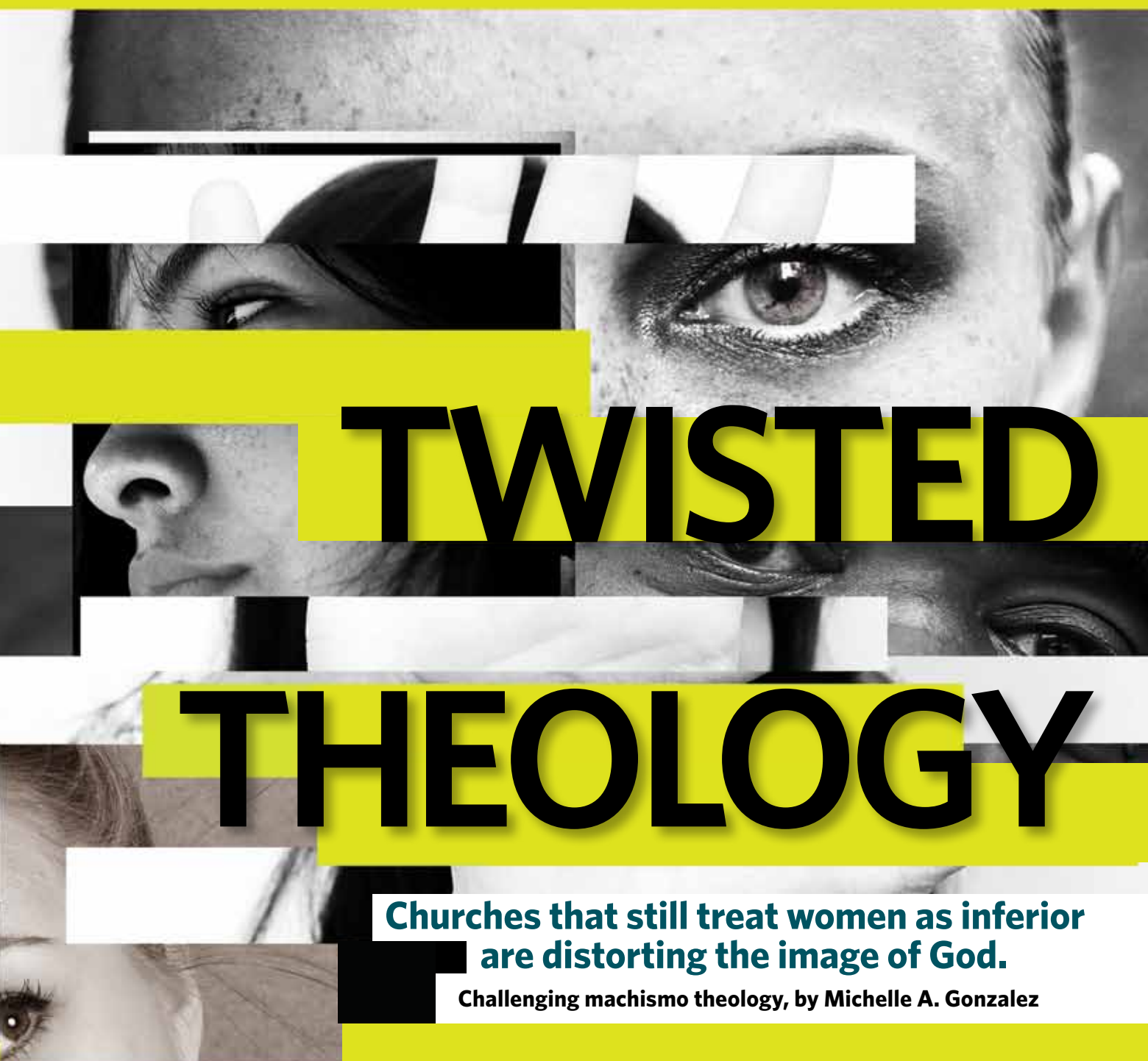


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THEOLOGY

**Churches that still treat women as inferior
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ON JAN. 15, had his life not been tragically cut short, Martin Luther King Jr. would be turning 85. In this issue, political economist Gar Alperovitz tantalizes us with what might have been. In the last few years of his life, King was coming to a more radical understanding of the nation's economic system—both its role in creating inequality and the possibility of a more democratic economy. As inequality has increased in recent years to unprecedented levels, the economic issues King was grappling with have become only more important for all of us.

Most sectors of society have seen real progress in advancing women's leadership. Yet too much of the church is still run by an obsolete framework of patriarchy, rooted in

a flawed understanding of scripture, which denies women ordination and other leading roles. Michelle A. Gonzalez explains why we need a theology of women that recognizes and embodies the incontrovertible insight that both men and women are made in the image of God—and that such recognition has profound implications for how we do church.

As the U.S. military prepares to begin the exit from Afghanistan, Lisa Schirch writes of military leaders learning the limitations of firepower as the "solution" to political problems. Mia Alvarado tells the story of her friend, Iraq veteran Joshua Casteel, and his death from lung cancer, likely caused by the toxic smoke from "burn pits" in Iraq. There

are 2.5 million veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; their struggles will continue to be a challenge and an opportunity for churches dealing with consequences of war.

Dr. Paul Farmer—called the "man who would cure the world" in the bestseller *Mountains Beyond Mountains* for his work in Haiti, Peru, and elsewhere—discusses Pope Francis' recent meeting with Gustavo Gutiérrez and describes how the principles of liberation theology can shape a more moral, and more effective, approach to public health.

All these stories, filled as they are with examples of love in the face of tragedy, help us to follow more closely the one who came to make us whole and to make the world "as it is in heaven." ■

Letters

SHOCKED

When reading "Unfinished Business" by Sara Wenger Shenk (November 2013), I was dismayed to learn that John Howard Yoder's disciplinary process was kept confidential because he "insisted" upon it. No wonder there were doubts about whether he confessed his sin or demonstrated any remorse! He controlled the process in the same way he abused his power and authority to give him access to the women he victimized. He was a brilliant theologian but also a narcissistic sexual predator. And dare I say, a hypocrite.

Ruth Costello
Crystal Lake, Illinois

JUSTICE FOR ALL

This summer I was privileged to perform a civil union service for two men. Both of their parents gave unqualified approval, with the mothers signing the covenant. Seldom have I experienced any service with so much satisfaction during my pastoral ministry. Thanks to Jim Wallis for his column "Equal Protection—for All" (September-October 2013) reminding us that love of one another is shown in justice for all.

Gene Birmingham
Bensenville, Illinois

AN INSPIRING NEIGHBOR

I enjoyed Danny Duncan Collum's article

"Love of one another is shown in justice for all."

"Passing of a Prophet" (September-October 2013) about my former neighbor, Will Campbell. Our family lived just down the road from Will and his wife in Mt. Juliet, Tenn., in the '80s and '90s. I had a high regard for him, but I was in awe of Will and spoke to him rarely—although I am pleased and proud to own his signed books.

After his death, my daughter was amazed to learn about Will's role in the civil rights struggles. I did not realize what a "Redneck, White Socks, and Blue Ribbon Beer" celebrity he'd been at some cost of local knowledge of his previous role. Thank you for your thoughtful and appreciative article about this man who helped form my thoughts and attitudes toward religion and social justice by just living "down the road" and following his calling.

Janet Pierce
Danville, Kentucky

CLIMATE HISTORY 101

In "Mourning for the Earth" (August 2013), Katharine Preston states that "we are the first generation of people who now know that our children's grandchildren will indeed not walk the same Earth." Surely this takes a limited view of human history. Our forebears faced far more dramatic changes

in climate than even the most extreme of current predictions. A few generations later, our ancestors faced further disruptions as the ice caps melted and the oceans rose far greater than any predictions for the next few hundred years. We perhaps need to exercise caution in considering ourselves as unique.

Stephen Carr
Zomba, Malawi

THE MUSIC OF PEACE

Thank you for Ramzi Kysia's fine article "The Song Remains" (August 2013) about Kathy Kelly. My husband and I have had the privilege of knowing Kathy for a long time and lovingly refer to her as our daughter. I wanted to add one thing to your article. A few years ago, Kathy told of some children in Iraq who taught her how to sing "This is My Song" in Arabic. It still causes me great joy whenever I hear it.

Rose Bagley
Naperville, Illinois

"I can't believe ...!" Want to respond to an article we've printed? Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

One Church, One Body



IN OCTOBER, Sojourners hosted a Washington, D.C. premiere for the faith community of the extraordinary film *12 Years a Slave*. The compelling story about Solomon Northup—a free man from New York who was kidnapped and sold into slavery—is an accurate and well-produced drama, worth seeing for its cinematic merits, but primarily as a start to a conversation about race in America that is long overdue.

In her *New York Times* review titled “The Blood and Tears, Not the Magnolias,” Manohla Dargis wrote that *12 Years a Slave* “isn’t the first movie about slavery in the United States—but it may be the one that finally makes it impossible for American cinema to continue to



and black arrests, convictions, and sentencing are abundantly clear, resulting in the mass incarceration of men of color. We tolerate murder rates for people of color that we would never tolerate for whites. We tolerate racial profiling of young black men, with results that we would never accept for our white teenage boys. And we tolerate deliberate and clear political efforts to diminish the votes of minority communities.

So who will lead in our racially polarized time? Who will help America navigate our changing demographics? Who will help a new generation create a diverse, multiracial society?

THE CHURCH HAS a prophetic role to play. Perhaps a community of faith that is intrinsically multiracial, and becoming more so, will lead in this area. The church in our country is Euro-American, African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and more.

This fall, Sojourners and more than 70 Christian leaders launched a pledge called “One Church, One Body.” The pledge invites the community of faith to engage in three commitments—first, to help build a multiracial faith community; second, to help fix an unjust criminal justice system; and third, to protect voting rights for minority citizens.

When racism is tolerated, the

reconciling work of Christ on the cross is contradicted. And when the church remains silent on the issue, we deny our calling to display the “manifold wisdom of God” through our unity and reconciliation. As we state in the pledge: “In Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female” (Galatians 3:28) ... Therefore, a multiracial body of Christ is not only admirable—it is intrinsic, mandated, and expected by God.”

The church is meant to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession,” so that we would “declare the praises of God who called [us] out of darkness into God’s wonderful light. Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are the people of God; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10). The Apostle Paul goes even further and describes how in Christ, we are one body (Ephesians 2:11-18).

It’s not easy to face the deep wounds of racism in our country and in our church. It will require self-examination and repentance. But just as Christ reconciled us to God, let us show each other the peace and mercy we have received. The church must be at the forefront of racial reconciliation in this country. It is our calling. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

When racism is tolerated, the reconciling work of Christ on the cross is contradicted.

sell the ugly lies it’s been hawking for more than a century.” The film reveals how morally outrageous the slave system was, and it is very hard to watch.

The enslavement of millions of people of African descent by white Americans was always violent, and too intense for most white people to really accept the truth. Most white people, white Christians, and white churches tolerated slavery for 246 years. This historically horrendous evil existed because we tolerated it. That’s why evil always continues to exist: because we tolerate it.

What do we tolerate today? We tolerated the gratuitous evil of slavery, and still tolerate the devaluing of black lives. We tolerate completely dysfunctional urban schools, but would we still do so if they were full of young white children? We tolerate a criminal justice system where the racial disparities between white

Jana Asenbrennerova/Reuters



Congo Hope

A woman celebrates the distribution of plastic tarps in a refugee camp in eastern Congo. The Church of Christ in Congo, an ecumenical organization representing 64 Congolese Protestant denominations, provided tarps, food, and medical care to families displaced by fighting in eastern Congo. In November, M23 rebels and government forces reached a tentative agreement that would end more than 20 months of bitter violence, bringing to a close this latest skirmish in "Africa's world war," in which more than 5 million people have been killed. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is 96 percent Christian.

By Paul Farmer

Sacred Medicine

How liberation theology can inform public health.

TWO OF MY greatest teachers were Latin American men, both ordained as Catholic priests. One, Archbishop Oscar Romero, was assassinated in 1980. I never met him, being a 20-year-old American who'd never set foot in El Salvador or anywhere else in Latin America. But Romero made me, a lapsed Catholic, wonder why his views—our views, if Christian social teaching means anything at all—would be viewed with murderous hostility by the Salvadoran elite. After all, it was all right there in the Book. Wasn't it?

The truth was, I didn't know. Was it worth looking at books about these matters? That's what we believed in medical school: Look it up! So Romero led me to the second of these teachers who, I'm happy to say, is alive and well and living (mostly) in Lima, Peru. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a diminutive and humble Dominican priest and a great friend of Romero's, taught me through his books,

from *The Power of the Poor in History* to *We Drink from our Own Wells*, and later through his friendship and his almost mystical (to me, in any case) optimism.

Over the course of my 20s, the slender, frayed thread of my own faith, which I had believed cut, slowly came back into view. There was a filament a bit stronger than imagined, made visible in part by my Haitian hosts and patients and friends, and in part by Catholic social activists working

taught me a lot about a space in the Catholic Church I'd not seen clearly before, and about the promise of long-term engagement in the monumental struggle against poverty and discrimination in all its forms. That includes gender inequality, no stranger to the institution. Most of the most inspiring activists were women.

NOW THERE IS a third Latin American priest on my mind. And happily for

Microbes also make a preferential option for the poor.

against poverty in settings as different as tough neighborhoods in Boston, the farms of North Carolina, and the slums of Lima.

Some were nuns or priests, some were engaged laity, from many professions. Most were people living in and struggling against their own and others' poverty. Their activism

our troubled but beautiful world, both Archbishop Romero and Father Gutiérrez are on Pope Francis' mind. You can't be a Jesuit from Argentina and not have liberation theology in your thoughts. But now the man is the pope in Rome, and progressive, indeed radical, ideas have not

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always found warm welcome there. That may be changing, just by Francis' words and actions, which have included how best to honor Romero's memory and a recent consultation with Father Gutiérrez. Just knowing of the recent meeting between the two South Americans, knowing they said a Mass together, warmed my heart, and not just "for the good of all the Church" (in the words of that liturgy). It warmed my heart, and wove those strings tighter, because the secular world also needs liberation theology.

OVER THE PAST 25 years, I've not learned much theology (medicine and anthropology were more than enough for me), but some of us have taken a number of key concepts from liberation theology and applied them in medicine. Let me comment on three that have been important to the work of Partners In Health, an organization I cofounded to make "a preferential option for the poor in health care" in settings ranging from rural Latin America (Haiti, Guatemala, Mexico) and Africa (Rwanda, Malawi, Lesotho) to areas of urban poverty (Peru, the United States) and even into the prisons of Siberia. Gutiérrez has written books about all of these ideas and has sought to teach and learn about them through his own ministry.

The first notion is the *preferential option for the poor*. Any serious examination of epidemic disease has always shown that microbes also make a preferential option for the poor. But medicine and its practitioners, even in public health, do so all too rarely. Imagine how much unnecessary suffering we might collectively avert if our health care and educational systems, foundations, and non-governmental organizations genuinely made a preferential option for the poor?

The second is the notion of *structural violence*. Sure, bad things happen. But they don't often happen randomly. Violence is done to some people in this world by poverty, racism, gender inequality, homophobia, and xenophobia. Just as this violence, which Gutiérrez and others term structural violence or "structural sin," can be institutionalized through unjust social arrangements, so too can it be undone with the help of more just ones.

The secular world needs to understand that what would "free us from all anxiety" is

opening up to the poor and otherwise marginalized the chance to flourish. This cannot happen if there is hunger, unfair political arrangements, ongoing assaults on the environment, and no safety net to protect the sick, the unemployed, and the frail. The current rules of modern capitalism cannot rid us of structural violence any more than wars or other forms of "event violence" can. But understanding how the social worlds in which we live are constructed might help us to do so, as can the mystery of hope.

The third notion is *accompaniment*. The power of this simple idea, a staple in liberation theology, came to me in contemplating patients facing both poverty and chronic disease. They missed appointments, didn't fill prescriptions, didn't "comply" with our counsel. And this was true in every country in which I've worked. But when we began working with community-health workers to take care to patients, the outcomes we all sought were much more likely to happen. Instead of asking "why don't patients comply with our treatments?" we began to ask, "How can we accompany our patients on the road to cure or wellness or a life with less suffering due to disease?" Again, the notion would be welcome in the world beyond the church: How many institutions, including those responsible for foreign aid, desperately need to replace time-limited, contractual, and almost invariably inegalitarian arrangements—the aid worker and the aid recipient—with genuine accompaniment and solidarity? My guess: almost all of them.

Just these notions alone are reminders of an institution stretching back 2,000 years that can still nurture leaders such as Archbishop Romero and Father Gutiérrez. It's my fervent wish that the church led by Pope Francis will canonize the first man and continue to listen to the second. We can all learn from both of them, just as they have learned by listening to the poor and oppressed. ■

Paul Farmer is the Kolokotronis University Professor at Harvard University and cofounder of Partners In Health. His most recent book is In the Company of the Poor: Conversations With Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez (Orbis Press). He has worked as an infectious disease physician in Haiti, Peru, Rwanda, and Boston.

From the Archives

January 1988

The Cost of Community

THERE ARE DAYS,

to tell the truth, that you just have to wonder if it's worth it to try to live in community. It's sort of like marriage and family life: It's a great idea, but the reality requires more blood, sweat, and tears than anybody ever told you about ahead of time. And sometimes you just wonder.

You stir a soup pot, and it seems there are always more hungry people at the door. You open the shower line, but more hot, sweaty, dirty bodies appear the minute you've finished. You visit the prisoners, but for every visit there are five more unaddressed needs. You work to devise strategies to stop the death penalty, and the state just sets another execution date. You sit down to pray, but the cacophony of your thoughts and feelings won't lie still long enough to get through a simple "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

We live together out of a commitment to the love that Christ gives us to share as a body, but sometimes it seems the best we can do is still to fail each other. And sometimes we just wonder: Is it worth it? Wouldn't it be better (and is that the same as easier?) just to give up? To go back to a more traditional lifestyle—one that's not so weird or isolated or cut off from the mainstream culture? ■

***Murphy Davis** was director of the Southern Prison Ministry and a member of the Open Door Community in Atlanta when this article appeared.*



U.S. and Dutch soldiers drive along a dusty road in a village in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan.

By Lisa Schirch

Lessons from Afghanistan

The long war has made clear the fantasy of firepower “solutions” to complex political problems.

AS THE U.S. prepares to officially (but not completely) pull out its military from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, some wonder whether it all was a waste. More than a decade of war has cost tens of thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars. But the balance sheet of “lessons learned” shows some less-depressing calculations.

In the last several years, U.S. generals have repeatedly told Congress and the U.S. public that “there is no military solution” to the war in Afghanistan. This marks a significant shift in military thinking. In the early 2000s, the boastful, overconfident views

Afghanistan’s political leaders who opposed the Taliban became de facto Western allies, even though many had ruled by force and racked up their own long list of human rights abuses. In the rush to set up a new government to replace the Taliban, the West propped up corrupt and tyrannical warlords as provincial governors, doom-ing hopes for an Afghan democracy and authentic leaders with popular support.

Counterinsurgency projects attempted to pull support from the Taliban and other insurgents by winning Afghan hearts and minds so they would trust their govern-

Saying no to war is not yet saying yes to peacebuilding.

that wars in Afghanistan and Iraq would be quick and easy outnumbered more cautious and skeptical military voices. If nothing else, more military leaders today are forth-rightly speaking out against the fantasy of firepower solutions to complex political problems.

The U.S. and its Western allies are also learning a related lesson: The lack of legitimate governance is a fundamen-tal cause of much of the world’s violence.

ment. But Western military forces learned that free handouts of Western aid money could not fundamentally change the cor-rupt nature of the Afghan government or its public image.

Adding further injury to the insult of this strategy was the West’s counterterror-ism approach, with drone bombs that killed civilians and brutal night raids humiliat-ing Afghan families in their homes. Perhaps Western forces also learned that their

counterterrorism strategy to “hunt down and kill the terrorists” lost hearts and minds at a rate faster than their counterinsurgency effort could win them.

Evidence that these lessons were learned is seen in the U.S. military’s new ways of training soldiers to identify civilians and new protocols calling for them to take greater risks themselves to reduce unintentional harm to civilians. Instead of referring to these deaths as “collateral damage,” the military started using the more honest term “civilian casualties.” While there were tens of thousands of Afghan civilian casualties during the initial U.S. bombing in 2001, Western troops greatly reduced their impact on civilians in the last five years. They learned that more civilian deaths meant more support for the Taliban.

Further evidence is seen in military leaders who are more skeptical of quick military solutions to Syria’s complex problems. This time, generals spoke out against war quicker than peace activists did. And the U.S. and European publics flooded Congress with pleas not to get their countries stuck in another quagmire.

But for all the mistakes made by the West in Afghanistan, the men, women, and children in Afghanistan and now Syria deserve even more than a united opposition to war. A renewed isolationism that turns our backs on their suffering is neither just nor peaceful.

If we learn anything from Afghanistan, it should be that Westerners failed to support peacebuilding—a more strategic approach to diplomacy and development that recognizes complex political and economic factors fueling war. The West overlooked and even undermined Afghan civil society, with its decades of experience working to resolve tribal disputes. Rather than working with the international community to support a comprehensive peace process including civil society, a small and doomed group of underfunded U.S. diplomats attempted to address a mountain of problems. Saying no to war is not yet saying yes to peacebuilding. ■

Lisa Schirch is the director of human security at the Alliance for Peacebuilding and professor at Eastern Mennonite University’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding in Virginia.

By Juliet Vedral

Foster Care for a New Millennium

Christians step up for modern-day “orphans in their distress.”

I WAS 7 YEARS OLD when my family first opened our home to foster children. My parents were in their early 40s and already had four children at home. They were somewhat typical for foster parents at that time: married, established, often people of faith. We had a total of 10 children in our home—two of whom were adopted—from 1988 until 1997. Fostering children was a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week commitment and calling. As my mother would say, “God sets the lonely in families—would am I willing to let him set them in mine?”

This is a question that more Christians—particularly the oft-maligned

300 of them are on the waitlist for adoptive homes. Many are siblings, and many more are adolescents, past the ages when most families typically want to adopt.

Enter DC127. This initiative began at The District Church in Washington’s Columbia Heights neighborhood with a mission to “reverse the list” of children waiting for foster and adoptive homes. Eight other churches in the District of Columbia have joined the movement, forming a network that spans Christian denominational lines. In early November, hundreds attended “Foster the City,” DC127’s first event, at D.C.’s convention center, packing breakout

The mission: “Reverse the list” of children and youth waiting for homes.

Millennials—are asking themselves. They are examining both the sheer number of children growing up without families and scripture to see what it says about their faith. Taking their cue, and often their names, from James 1:27 (“look after orphans and widows in their distress”), groups in Colorado, Arizona, Oklahoma, Virginia, and most recently the District of Columbia have committed to looking after these modern-day “orphans in their distress.”

According to the Administration for Children and Families, in 2012 there were 400,000 children in foster care nationwide. Of that number, 102,000 were waiting to be adopted. Only 52,000 children were adopted in 2012; at the end of 2011, 15 percent of youth in the system lived in group homes or institutions. What is most troubling is the number of youth who “age out” of the system every year without the support of a family. At the end of 2011, 11 percent, or 26,000 youth in the system, aged out. These youth are much more likely to experience homelessness, health problems, unemployment, incarceration, and other trouble later in life.

In Washington, D.C., there are about 1,300 children in the foster care system;

sessions and signing up with various foster agencies.

The people who have rallied around DC127 set it apart from similar initiatives—many of them are young and single, not the typical demographic for foster families. “The District Church is made up of 75 percent single adults between the ages of 20 to 35 years old, so when trying to recruit foster parents, our congregation is not made up of too many likely candidates,” says Amy Graham, discipleship pastor at The District Church.

The young professional population in Washington is notoriously transient and often focused on using the city to advance their careers, not their faith. Yet many of DC127’s volunteers are rising to the challenge, offering support and advocacy in lieu of homes. But, Graham continues, “seeds are being planted into their lives so when they do start thinking about what it looks like to be a family, fostering children in D.C. or elsewhere will more likely be a part of that equation.” ■

Juliet Vedral is assistant to the president of Sojourners, which supported the founding of The District Church.

And Now, the Rest of the Story

A FEW YEARS ago in this column, I told the story of Charlene, a woman I had just met in a camp for displaced people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Charlene's civilian husband had been murdered by rebel fighters in Congo's brutal civil war. She and her eight children then fled for their lives, ultimately finding shelter in the hovel of mud and sticks where I met them (September-October 2010).

Like thousands of other displaced Congolese women, Charlene had been forced by destitution to hike into the forest for firewood to trade for food for her children. Like thousands of other displaced Congolese women, Charlene had been brutalized by fighters who hid in the forests and used rape as a weapon of war. Like thousands of other displaced Congolese women, Charlene had been impregnated by

keep speaking, writing, and advocating for Congo.

I didn't expect that I'd ever know what happened to Charlene. Just a few weeks ago an amazing thing happened. A friend traveling in Congo with the same organization I'd traveled with four years ago sent me an email filled with exclamation points. "I met your Charlene! She's doing so well! She's become a strong, joyful leader for other women! You wouldn't believe the transformation!"

I was thrilled! But then I looked at the photo of Charlene that my friend had sent. The woman in the photo was strong and joyful, and maybe her name was Charlene, but she wasn't *my* Charlene. Anyone could see that.

But my friend insisted. She sent me additional photos and tracked down the translator who had originally introduced me to Charlene. He confirmed that the woman in the new photos was, indeed, my Charlene—my Charlene transformed!

Unknown to me, a small portion of funds I had donated to a ministry in Congo had been given to Charlene. I had wanted that to happen, of course, but was never sure that it had. I feared that Charlene had slipped through the cracks of a system strained to the breaking point. But she hadn't! She had received the money and had used it to start a soap-making business so she could earn money without going into the rebel-infested forest.

The soap business grew and eventually became a source of income and hope to



From destitution and fear to security: Charlene

many women in the camp. Charlene even saved enough money to buy a small parcel of land. Soon, she'll be moving out of the camp and into her own home.

Recently, a filmmaker traveling in Congo met Charlene. He was so moved by her story that he joined the movement to help her 4-year-old son and others like him. A baby born of rape and destined for despair, David is one of many who now face a future filled with possibility.

For years, Charlene's face haunted me and compelled me to action. It no longer haunts me—on the contrary, it fills me with joy!—but it still compels me to action. Why? Because there are thousands of Charlenes in Congo. Thousands of stories waiting for a new ending. Sometimes we never hear the end of the story, but when we do—as I did with Charlene—it's a stunning reminder that even our small acts of love can make a huge difference.

Is God's Spirit nudging you to touch the life of a woman in Congo?

Find out how at worldrelief.org/standforcongo. ■

Lynne Hybels, co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is author of *Nice Girls Don't Change the World*.



For years, Charlene's face haunted me and compelled me to action.

her rapist. Because of the stigma of rape in that culture, the beautiful two-week-old baby she'd named David was destined to a life of marginalization and despair.

Charlene was the first woman I met in Congo. She explained to me that even when the women went to the forest in groups, armed rebels would overpower and rape them. If husbands went into the forest to protect their wives, the rebels would kill the husbands, and then rape the wives. The women took the risk—and paid the price.

For me, Charlene gave human shape to Congo's horrific story of colonial exploitation, tribal conflict, and foreign greed. In the four years after we met, hers was the first story I told whenever I spoke about Congo. It was her pain that motivated me to



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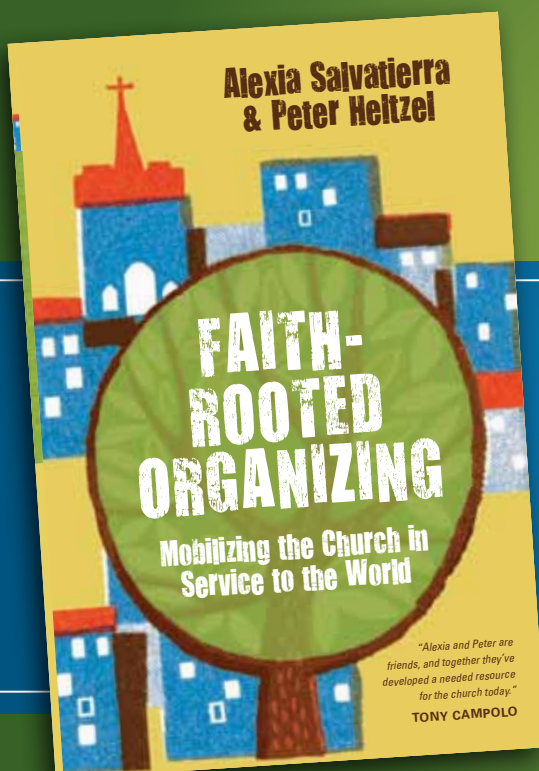
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WELL DONE, FAITHFUL ORGANIZER.

What if Christians were to shape their organizing around the implications of the truth that God is real and Jesus is risen? Reverend Alexia Salvatierra and theologian Peter Heltzel propose a model of organizing that arises from their Christian convictions, with implications for all faiths.

"In my lifetime organizing has never been more important and more effective than it is right now. . . . This book is a must-read for all in the church today who are concerned about their schools, towns, states and nation—and want to do something about it!"

—**TONY CAMPOLO**, founder of Red Letter Christians and professor emeritus, Eastern University

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A Daringly Astute Faith

EARLIER THIS FALL, I had the good fortune to speak at St. Martin's University, a Benedictine school on a beautiful campus about 90 minutes south of Seattle. Our campus guide was Jennifer Fellingner, a woman who was raised Catholic and attended Xavier (a Jesuit university in Cincinnati), but had drifted a bit. She didn't feel pushed away; she'd just been caught up in the madness of family life and work, and faith had slipped away from her center.

And then Pope Francis spoke. Or rather, gave an interview that was published by Jesuit magazines across the world. Her voice cracked as she described how that interview had returned the light of her faith to the center of her life.

On the drive from Sea-Tac airport to Lacey, Wash., where St. Martin's is located, Fellingner quoted long segments of it from memory. Her favorite part was toward

Just like that, the pope had gotten to the heart of Islam, my religion.

the end of the long interview when Pope Francis described Catholicism as a "journey faith" rather than a "lab faith." She loved the story the pope told about being sick in the hospital with lung disease, and having the doctor come by and clinically prescribe him a certain dose of medicine. The sister who was on duty tripled the dose because she had a visceral sense of how he felt, as she was around sick people all day. It was a great example of the wisdom of presence and the gentleness that comes with simply being with people. The pope had called this sister "daringly astute." Jennifer loved that. "This is what my Catholic faith is about, this is what I am striving for when I am faithful—to be daringly astute," she exclaimed.



Pope Francis reminds us that religion can be inspiring.

It was enough to send me back to the interview, written up in *America* magazine and perfectly titled "A Big Heart Open to God." There is so much richness in those pages—richness that reminded me of reading the Muslim poet Rumi—that it feels strange to pull out only one segment. But if I had to, it would be the part where Pope Francis says that he feels his motto is *Miserando atque Eligendo*—"by having mercy and by choosing." And then he continues by saying, "I think the Latin gerund *miserando* is impossible to translate in both Italian and Spanish. I like to translate it with another gerund that does not exist: *misericiordando*." That made-up Latin word translates into English as "mercy-ing."

Just like that, the pope had gotten to the heart of Islam, my religion. In the Qur'an, God tells the Prophet Muhammad that he is made to be nothing but a special mercy upon all the worlds. The most common Muslim prayer is "In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful."

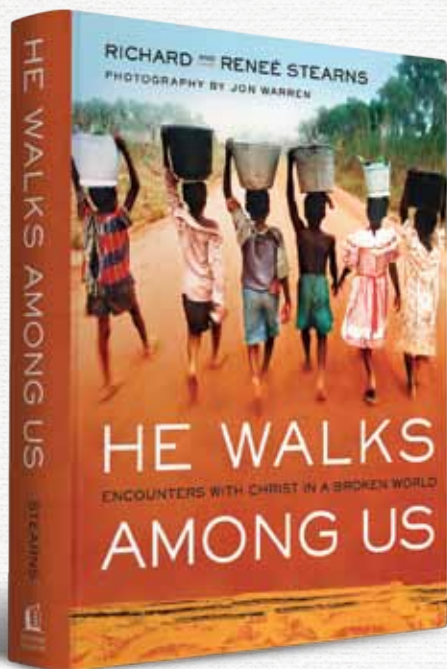
The first lesson classical Muslim scholars taught their students was, "If you are merciful to those on Earth, the one who is in Heaven will be merciful to you."

The words of the pope returned these essentials from the Muslim tradition to my mind and, at least momentarily, brought them back to the center of my life. Because the truth is, I've been drifting a bit, too. I guess you can blame it on the jazz and war of working family life. The bottom line is, I'd be lying if I said I keep my faith at the center at all times. All of us, I imagine, need reminders of an essential but oft-forgotten truth: Religion can be inspiring.

For this Muslim, at this time, that reminder just happened to come in the form of words spoken by the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage.



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BREAKING THE HABITS OF MACHISMO

Some churches calling themselves Christian continue to act as if women are second-class citizens in the kingdom of God—despite what the Bible says.

by **MICHELLE A. GONZALEZ**

FOR CENTURIES Christians have pondered what it means to be created in the image of God. Throughout my own academic career, I've been haunted by the mystery of Genesis 1:27: "God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them" (CEB).

What does this passage reveal about us, and consequently, what does it reveal about God? The second half of the passage is equally contentious and challenging. Does "male and female God created them" imply that men and women reflect the image of God equally?

While Genesis 2 to 3, with its narrative of sin and betrayal, is captivating, there is something about the simplicity, mystery, and implications of Genesis 1:27 that resonates even today. I would argue that Genesis 1:27 is the foundation of an egalitarian anthropology where male *and* female are at the center of theological reflection, where they reflect the image of God without hierarchy or preference. The existence of distinctive genders in humanity does not imply any sort of sexuality within God. Instead, the metaphor retains the unknowability and mystery of God. It reminds us that there are similarities and great differences between the created and Creator. The metaphor "image of God" both reveals and conceals something about the nature of God—and the nature of humanity.

Photo illustration by Ken Davis



What would change

*if Christians acted as if women really
are “made in the image of God”?*

“ALMOST EVERYTHING.”—@Michelleannlib



Genesis 1:27 has been a source of inspiration, debate, and controversy throughout the history of Christianity. The church fathers (writing between 150 and 500 C.E.) often implied that women must negate their very womanhood in order to reflect their creation in God's image. These male writers in the early church viewed female bodies as an impediment to reflecting the image of God. Augustine of Hippo argued that although women spiritually share the image of God, they do so in spite of their bodies—women's bodies corrupt and diminish their ability to reflect the image of God. In this thinking, women reflect a distorted image; we are inherently deficient.

Centuries later, medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas were profoundly influenced by Aristotle, who viewed women as a lesser species than men. Aquinas described women as “defective” and “misbegotten.” In describing women as misbegotten males created solely for the purpose of procreation, Aquinas perpetuated an Aristotelian and unbiblical notion of humanity that leaves a mark on Christian theology today.

The traditional theologians and church fathers acknowledged the rationality of a woman's mind but—because women are symbolically tied to their bodies—argued that her salvation must be seen as the negation of her nature. In other words, women are redeemed *in spite of* their femaleness. In this view, a woman's reflection of the *imago*

influenced by an obsolete misogynist ideological framework that views women as the passive recipients to the active male principle. This leads to a “separate but equal” mentality that maintains the male as primary.

An egalitarian notion of the *imago Dei* is the foundation for a theological anthropology that reflects a deeper understanding of Genesis 1:27. In order to achieve this vision of the human, the underlying patriarchal worldview that has shaped the Christian tradition must be acknowledged and transformed. One cannot simply add women as “equals” into a malformed patriarchy and produce an egalitarian anthropology. The distorted structure itself must be redeemed.

An emphasis on male or female bodies leads us to examine how humanity's sexual embodiment contributes to the distinctiveness of our humanity. To put it rather bluntly, men and women are embodied in very different ways. If you take the body seriously, then you must examine how this distinctive embodiment shapes one's theological anthropology. These differences between us do not automatically lead to a theology of “complementarity.” We need to understand ourselves as whole, not fractional individuals that are completed once we find our “other half” in the opposite sex.

OUR DEEPER understanding of the egalitarian metaphor in Genesis 1:27 not only

and men equally, we must re-examine how we understand the divine.

When our interior image of God and our exterior references to God are exclusively male and “father,” we reinforce patriarchal constructions of the image of God that are based on a hierarchy that values men *at the expense of* women.

This has real-world effects. It leads to women not being allowed to preach, lead from the altar, celebrate communion, administer rites, pastor congregations, or teach, and a myriad of less-overt restrictions in the here and now. It's seen in the manner in which women's bodies are constantly reduced to objects of sexual temptation, sometimes with dire consequences. These attitudes can lead to greater violence against women, such as we see in the increasing exploitation and attacks on young women and how social media is used to perpetuate and document these horrific acts.

As the broader church reclaims the divine image shared equally between women and men, our symbols and language of the divine are transformed. When our image of the divine is transformed, then our human relations are also redeemed.

Human equality is a value held by most faith traditions. Even if some denominations or nondenominational movements limit women's access to leadership or deny women's call to certain forms of ministry, most still uphold the value that a woman's

What would change ...

“Women would be able to remove the limitations of being held as second-class citizens within faith communities. Then this revelation would move into the secular world, enhancing women's empowerment.” —Martie Wyatt, Tulsa, Okla.

What would change ...

“The end of sexual assault, harassment, and inequality in everything.” —@Dagarvelo

Dei is something she lost in the Fall and will only fully recover in the afterlife.

DESPITE TREMENDOUS spiritual growth and new understandings, both in science and theology, there are still aspects of Christianity that are overtly or covertly shaped by this kind of theological framework. Contemporary Christian notions of what it means to be male and female remain

dramatically affects our human relationships, but it also has implications for how we understand God. The same misinterpretation from the Christian tradition that led to patriarchal church teachings (and therefore structures) has also led to a patriarchal image of God. The two feed off of each other, especially in the context of the *imago Dei*. To truly understand the *imago Dei* as a dimension of humanity that is shared by women

sacredness is not diminished because of her gender. But if we say we believe that men and women are made in God's image, then aren't we required to make it a tenet of faith and take the necessary steps to put this aspect of our faith into practice?

RECENTLY, THANKS largely to the refreshing new spirit of Pope Francis, the question of women's full participation in Christian

life has been revived. (It never went away, but the spotlight has now returned.) In Pope Francis' widely circulated September interview in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal, he called for the fuller participation of women in the Church. "Women are asking deep questions that must be addressed," he said. "We have to work harder to develop a profound theology of the woman ... The feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions." Pope Francis appeared to critique the theology of gender complementarity that has dominated Vatican rhetoric, noting that it is too often "inspired by an ideology of machismo." Yet this is tempered by his comment earlier in the summer that the issue of women's ordination to the Catholic priesthood is a closed matter, as well as by his upholding the investigation of women religious in the U.S. (at least so far).

Additionally, a movement has arisen in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormon Church) advocating that women be ordained. Despite Mitt Romney's quip during the 2012 presidential debates that he had "binders full of women" to choose from for his gubernatorial cabinet, his church has not recognized women's call to the priesthood. The Ordain Women website advances full ordination for Mormon women. "To deny women access to decision-making authority in any community—religious or otherwise—opens

One cannot simply add women as "equals" into a malformed patriarchy—the distorted structure itself must be redeemed.



What would change ...

"An economic overhaul; the valuing of all girls and women and our revaluation of ourselves; the benefits of our talents, intelligence, and experiences—with incalculable consequence; not to mention transformed relations with Islam and other worldviews."—Valerie Coe Lowder, Lilburn, Ga.

up a space for the more extreme forms of discrimination and abuse that millions of women in the world endure," says Ordain Women's Lorie Winder.

Statistics increasingly show that the rise of the religiously unaffiliated ("nones"—those who list their religious affiliation as "none of the above") among Roman Catholics, Latinos, and youth across the United States is changing our religious



landscape. Increasingly, youth describe Christianity as anti-gay and anti-woman.

The “nones” are challenging the values gap they perceive in the way churches put their faith into practice. As one “none,” who is young, Catholic, and a woman, put it, “I think the only way for churches to reverse the exodus of the ‘nones’ is by becoming different churches.” Sentiments like these and the statistical trends in Christianity remind

Many young people see Christianity as anti-gay and anti-woman.

us that the issue of women’s role in churches and on altars is far from decided.

While some may decry a lost generation that has become morally bankrupt and less religious, I would argue that our youth are challenging us to reassess some traditional Christian habits—particularly those that stem from a patriarchal past and outdated customs.

ALL THIS BRINGS me back to Genesis 1:27. Through our relationship with God, our fellow human beings, and the rest of creation, we reflect the image of God within us. This is not an uncritical and romanticized understanding of relationships. Not all relations reflect the image of God. Relationships that

rooted in male-oriented power structures than in Jesus Christ, our icon and mirror. Too often Jesus’ maleness becomes normative within a patriarchal theology. Making an idol of Jesus’ maleness has the effect of putting limitations on women reflecting the image of God. To deify maleness takes us back to the fundamental flaws in the church fathers who argued that men reflect God’s image more appropriately than women. Our theologies must draw all God’s creation toward the Creator—equally, fully—to be redeemed.

Women’s role in the home, workforce, and society are still contested in the United States. What is the “ideal” Christian woman celebrated in our churches? What messages are our churches sending women—especially the 75 percent in the U.S. who work to support themselves and their families? What messages are our churches sending women about their own moral agency, about stepping into authority, about ethical leadership, about preaching, teaching, and administering the Word of God? These are all clues into the still-limited manner in which women are understood within Christianity.

What will it take to break down the habits of machismo still present in Christian communities? Where in our churches is the genius of women restricted, curtailed, or even threatened? What steps can we take to fully embrace a “profound new theology of

THE SOUND OF SILENCING—AND SPEAKING OUT

Her pastor told her it was ‘against scripture’ for females to preach • by ANGELA KISSEL

When furloughed Peace Corps worker Angela Kissel showed up to support Sojourners’ Faithful Filibuster on Capitol Hill in September, she was surprised to be handed a Bible and invited to read from the podium some of the more than 2,000 biblical verses related to poverty and justice.

—The Editors

READING SCRIPTURE outside the Capitol may not seem like a momentous occasion, but for me it was divine. You see, the day before, a well-intentioned pastor told me my place in the church was limited to specific roles because I’m a female. He told me it was against scripture for any female to preach, that roles for leadership are clearly only for men, the “father” figures of the church.

In response, I listed every female prophet and leader. I went through the patriarchal lens in which parts of the Bible are written due to culture and general misogynistic norms of the time. I noted

What would change ...

“If the world saw Christians treating each other equally, as two halves of the same whole, rather than dividing over doctrinal issues such as complementary sex roles, our witness would be more appealing, especially with Millennials.” —Bill Kirklin, Franklin, Ind.

What would change ...

“Truly believing women [are] made in the image of God would eliminate domestic violence.”

—@EduDiva

limit women’s full participation in their churches, that deny their call to ministry, or place women in positions of submission do not authentically reflect *imago Dei* relationships. Male and female reflect the image of God equally and express this image through their own historical, social, and cultural particularity.

As we look to the future of Christianity, we must lay aside theologies that are more

women”? Gratefully, we can find the roots of this transformation within the wealth of our Christian tradition itself. ■

Michelle A. Gonzalez is associate professor of religious studies at the University of Miami. Her books include *Sor Juana: Beauty and Justice in the Americas* and *Created in God’s Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology*.

the hypocrisy of highlighting some scriptures while blatantly overlooking others when it doesn’t fit the current agenda. And lastly, I walked through Jesus’ ministry and discussed how he went against cultural norms to illustrate the equality of women to the extent of choosing a woman to tell the world the full story of the gospel.

After an exhausting 65 minutes, we agreed to disagree. We prayed and ended

the conversation. I walked away drained and slightly defeated. I wondered why God had put something on my heart and empowered me to speak up, when God knew I'd lose the battle. I also started to question myself and wondered if I should just stop fighting.

But then, not even 24 hours later, God used something so much bigger than me to affirm not only that this passion came from God, but also that shutting up and letting agendas get in front of the Creator was not an option.

The cultural norms in biblical times used to silence the poor, widows, women, orphans, and the foreigner are echoed in our society today. We fashion ourselves to be followers of the Word, but if we need Bibles that literally highlight every word of God that has to do with how the vulnerable should be treated, then I'm afraid we are following a "convenient" Christianity. Real Christianity is a difficult, tiring, and sometimes dangerous path. It's not meant to fit our agendas.

The true gospel is counterintuitive to every natural selfish motive we have. Sometimes it means physically caring for others. Sometimes it's standing in the gap when people are in need. And sometimes it means reading scripture in front of the Capitol to affirm the Word of God and pray for our leaders. We are all children of God, created equally in the image of our Creator. Silencing or limiting anyone's voice is against the nature of God and against the redemption that all Christians should be ushering into this broken world.

I thought I was walking to the Capitol to observe something wonderfully holy, but I had no idea that God was going to use this to encourage me. Being asked to step to a podium and read the Word of God,

What would change ...

**"Women would embrace their worth
and be more invested in pursuing their
mission in the church and in the world."**

—@B_mariegreen

a day after I was told it wasn't my place, brought me to tears. We serve a God who has put passion in the hearts of all of God's children. If we silence even one of those voices, we are missing out on a precious piece of God's redemptive plan for this side of Eden. ■

Angela Kissel is a 20-something Jesus feminist who's never met a cup of coffee or a glass of champagne she didn't like. A version of this essay ran on the God's Politics blog.



Martin Luther King Jr.
delivers a speech at the
Gillfield Baptist Church, in
Petersburg, Va.,
in May 1960.

BY GAR ALPEROVITZ

IN THE LAST YEAR of his life, Martin Luther King Jr. struggled with what are best understood as existential challenges as he began to move toward an ever-more-profound and radical understanding of what would be required to deal with the nation's domestic and international problems.

The direction he was exploring, I believe, is far more relevant to the realities we now face than many have realized—or have wanted to realize.

I first met King in 1964 at the Democratic Party's national convention held that year in Atlantic City—the occasion of an historic challenge by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) to the racially segregated and reactionary Mississippi Democratic Party. I was then a very young aide working for Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. Sen. Nelson authorized me to help out in any way I could despite President Lyndon Johnson's effort to clamp down on the fight for representation in the interest of a “dignified” convention that would nominate him in his own right after his rise to the presidency following President Kennedy's assassination. Johnson didn't want a bunch of civil rights activists muddying the waters and, not incidentally, causing him problems in the conservative, race-based Democratic South.

After much back and forth, the Johnson administration offered a “compromise” proposal that the old guard be seated (provided they pledged to support him) and that two at-large representatives of the MFDP also be seated.

Any “compromise” that seated the racist delegates was anathema to the MFDP, many of whose representatives had repeatedly risked their lives in the fight for equality. However, King, who desperately needed Johnson's help in connection with a broad range of evolving national civil rights issues, proposed accepting the “compromise” after presenting a range of arguments for and against it. The performance was “Hegelian” in its complexity, according to one close witness. “So, being a Negro leader, I want you to take this,” King urged, “but if I were a Mississippi Negro, I would vote against it.”

The MFDP delegates were having none of it. During one meeting King was shouted down, and during another the legendary activist Bob Moses reportedly “tore King up,” declaring: “We're not here to bring politics to our morality, but to bring morality to our politics.”

My own sympathies were with the MFDP and with the



Howard Sochurek/Time Life pictures



BEYOND THE DREAMER

As the country marks Martin Luther King Jr.'s 85th birthday, a veteran activist explains why it would be a mistake to remember King as only a great civil rights leader.

position urged by Moses. Indeed, I went to Mississippi following the convention and toured the state with him—a buttoned up young Senate aide trying to understand the depth of MFDP's commitment and the deeper source of their radical stance and criticism of King. (We were continuously followed by state troopers; I remember vividly how one patrol car would track any vehicle driven by Moses for hours—especially with a white man alongside in the front seat—and then pass us on to another, endlessly.) I also recall sleeping

My second encounter with King involved his opposition to the Vietnam War, something he did not express publicly for a substantial period. He began to speak out against some of the most egregious aspects of the war as early as 1965 when, in an address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he called for an end to U.S. bombing—and ran into opposition from his primary political base.

Many religious leaders of the more traditional parts of the civil rights move-

are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression ... We in the West must support these revolutions."

Such words clearly needed to be followed by action—and very shortly after the speech King came to Cambridge, Mass., along with Dr. Benjamin Spock, to help launch an activist effort against the war that I had helped create called "Vietnam Summer." Then a Fellow of the Institute of Politics at Harvard, I spent a number of hours driving with him to Cambridge, introduced him and Spock at a press conference launching the effort, and then accompanied King, Spock, and a large group of activists as they began a doorbell-ringing campaign to get people involved in anti-war actions that ranged from middle class petition signing to "Hell No We Won't Go" draft-card burning rallies. The King of 1967 was calm and resolute, a very different man from the careful and cautious King I had met in 1964.

Found in his pocket after the assassination in Memphis was a list of "10 Commandments" he planned to use in a speech to a large anti-war rally in New York on April 27, 1968. Perhaps the most important for our own time: "Thou shalt not believe in a military victory. Thou shalt not believe that the generals know best. Thou shalt not believe that the world supports the United States. Thou shalt not kill."

He was assassinated a year to the day after his Riverside Church speech.

SHORTLY AFTER THE launch of Vietnam Summer, at King's request, I met with him and his assistants Andrew Young and Bernard Lee to sketch out strategies to create new community-wide, democratically owned economic institutions that might also begin to build political power. King's interest in these strategies was a harbinger of a larger, more complicated direction that was clearly evolving in his own mind.

Here was a man—especially in the last years of his life—who clearly was thinking not simply about new programs and policies, but about what can only be called changing the system. "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar," King said. "It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

On another occasion, King said, "One day we must ask the question, 'Why are there 40

"He froze as he looked at the picture of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead baby, a baby killed by our military. That's when the decision was made."

in isolated rural farm houses, many of which had shotguns at the ready by the door.

The 1964 MFDP event underscores some of the complicated and contradictory pressures King was struggling with—and how he was trying to straddle and compromise in ways he felt appropriate given the national role he was playing at this relatively early moment in the 1960s.

It is also well to remember how strong, indeed vicious, were the ongoing attacks King faced not only from the Right, but from the establishment press. King was routinely and intensely interrogated on his numerous appearances on *Meet the Press*, perhaps the most important national platform in the pre-internet and pre-cable television era. For instance, an interviewer in 1965 interrogated him about an appearance at the Highlander Folk School: "Dr. King, the AP reported the other day that a picture taken of you in 1957 at a Tennessee interracial school is being plastered all over Alabama billboards with the caption 'Martin Luther King at a Communist training school.' Will you tell us whether that was a Communist training school and what you were doing there?" Numerous print journalists were equally relentless. Syndicated columnist Joseph Alsop, for example, charged that "[Communist] agents are beginning to infiltrate certain sectors of the Negro civil rights movement ... The subject of the real head-shaking is the Rev. Martin Luther King ... [H]e has accepted and is almost certainly still accepting Communist advice."

ment strongly believed that any challenge to Johnson and the war would burden the movement with far more than it could sustain. King's own organization, the SCLC, disassociated itself from his position by adopting a resolution carefully confining the organization's actions to the "question of racial brotherhood."

It was a *Ramparts* magazine report in early 1967 with many photos of Vietnamese children who had been the victims of U.S. napalm bombing that pushed King over the edge about the war. "He froze as he looked at the pictures," his assistant Bernard Lee recalled. "He saw a picture of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead baby, a baby killed by our military ... That's when the decision was made."

King's thunderous challenge to the war and the Johnson administration came in a now-famous Riverside Church speech on April 4, 1967—and the language was no longer "Hegelian." Indeed the contrast between the King I met in Atlantic City three years before and the King of Riverside Church could not have been starker.

In the Riverside speech, King brought the question of violence by angry black activists into a new and highly controversial focus. "I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos," King said, "without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government." He continued, "These are revolutionary times. All over the globe [people]

million poor people in America?’ And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy and to ask questions about the whole society.” Elsewhere he added, “Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all God’s children.”

What King meant by “democratic socialism” or a something beyond capitalism is clearly ambiguous—and his evolving thoughts on the issue were tragically cut short. Some believe he had in mind something like the Swedish welfare state he found so laudable when he traveled to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize. My own sense is that his repeated statements point in the direction of something more profound—a democratic form of system-wide change corresponding to the broad, participatory vision he affirmed, a system beyond both traditional capitalism and traditional socialism that hopefully one day may come into clearer focus and definition.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a great civil rights leader, but to remember him only in this way is to diminish what he was about and what we can learn from him. What stands out—as lessons for our own day and to each of us now—is his growing understanding of the importance of confronting ever-more-fundamental issues, even in the face of challenges from the press, the establishment, and his own religious constituency, to say nothing of those on the Right.

It is well to honor the vision he offered of one day achieving a society beyond racism, but even more important to consider his own struggle and the larger trajectory of thought and action he seemed to be exploring. It is a trajectory that points to a very different role for the U.S. in the world, and one that looks to fundamental, far-reaching systemic change to honor her ideals, no matter how difficult to achieve or how long the task. ■

Gar Alperovitz is Lionel R. Bauman Professor of Political Economy at the University of Maryland and cofounder of the Democracy Collaborative. His latest book is What Then Must We Do? This article is drawn from work in progress on a personal memoir.

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Shepherds

Pitch black.
Then a light out of the sky.
Am I asleep already?
I hear voices.
A rumor, they say:
 A refugee couple living in a box
 in Bethlehem.
 Had a baby. Screaming. Cold. Hungry.
The voices are singing,
 “All will be well,
 All will be well.”
Like papa says, “Dreaming is the only
 hope poor folks have.”

Night.
The sheep huddled against this big rock.
Jake keeps watch while I wrestle with sleep:
 —wool prices down, third year
 —owner talks of selling out
 —Jake and me—Where do we go?
 —Martha’s carrying our fifth child
 —rumors that Herod’s at it again,
 —this time killing babies.
 —Same old story:
 the Empire trades in fear.
 Where can we run?
Like papa says, “I hate being poor.”

*Harry C. Kiely, co-author of One Nation, Many Gods, is a retired United Methodist clergy living in Silver Spring, Md.
Photo by Katie Ford.*

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THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF WAR

Joshua Casteel was an interrogator at Abu Ghraib prison and later staffed open-air burn pits in Iraq. The experience changed his life—even as it cut it short.

LATELY I'VE BEEN reading my dead friend's files. That's how I know that he often typed in Cambria. That's how I know that he drafted beginning-to-end, reworking early paragraphs before he set down the next—which is why so much of his writing just stops. That's how I know that as a child he held press conferences in a White House made of cardboard boxes, wearing a clip-on tie, and that the night before he began school at West Point (a school he'd soon leave), he and his father smoked cigars on a hill overlooking the Hudson River, though his father did not like cigars. That's how I know how much he thought about pain, which to Heidegger is "the rift," a "separating that gathers," and to Wittgenstein is "a *having*, not a knowing," and to Elaine Scarry is an "objectless experience" that "destroys language."

This thinking was for classes at the University of Iowa and the University of Chicago, and this thinking was for other people, namely prisoners and fellow soldiers in the War on Terror, which was also the Global War on Terrorism, and was the Iraq War and is still the War in Northwest Pakistan and the War in Afghanistan, a subset of which is "Operation Enduring Freedom," and is also and continues to be World War III or



Family photo

World War IV, depending on how you count, and was once The War Against Al-Qaeda and is now the Overseas Contingency Operation, which has been tidily renamed CVE (Countering Violent Extremism).

Joshua Casteel was sent to the Long War after first enlisting in the Army Reserves as a high school junior in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Seven years later he was stationed at Abu Ghraib prison as an interrogator and linguist. This is where he became convicted that he could no longer be an "American war fighter," which he saw as treason against his "real kingdom and home."

In *Letters from Abu Ghraib*, a book of correspondence from this time, Joshua wrote to his parents:

So, I just experienced why it is I am here in Iraq. Other than all the struggle I've been wrestling with ... I just "met" my reason—a foreign jihadist who would kill me if he had the chance (that is, as long as I am a U.S. soldier in Muslim lands). The gospel came out of his mouth unwittingly, though, while trying to convert me to Islam. It was beautiful. I was dumbstruck. I left praising Christ and thanking God for this enemy. I confessed to this jihadist my sins and asked him to look at his own. I'm pretty certain that this interrogation was not "doctrinal" by Army standards. Pardon my bluntness, but to hell with the Army

Photo by Tim Schoon

"To hell with the Army and its 'doctrines.' Today was a moment where life mattered!"

—Joshua Casteel





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and their “doctrines.” Today was a moment where life mattered!

Here was reconciliation: the beginning of the end of war. And here was the “crystallization of conscience” that later helped Joshua become a conscientious objector to war. He went on leave to Qatar for a few days. When he returned to Abu Ghraib, he went to his supervisor and told him that he no longer wished to interrogate the Saudi Arabian prisoner. The next day he told his company commander that he no longer wished to be a soldier.

Joshua was transferred to noncombatant duty and staffed open-air burn pits. In these giant holes burned all manner of trash, day and night. In a weakly worded 2010 memo, the Department of Defense advised against the use of burn pits—though they are still being used. Under the definition for “covered waste” was listed: “hazardous waste ... medical waste ... tires, treated wood, batteries, compressed gas cylinders unless empty with valves removed, fuel containers unless completely evacuated of contents, aerosol cans, polychlorinated biphenyls, petroleum, oils, and lubricants products (other than waste fuel for initial combustion), asbestos, mercury, [and] foam tent material.” This is what should *not* be burned, which is what was burned. Add weapons to the list. Add paint. Add human body parts. The dust particles from the smoke were small and sharp, with traces of titanium from electronics or IEDs. Joshua worked without a mask above this fire. For six months, he slept 100 yards away.

When he came home and went running along the Iowa River, and later by Lake Michigan, he did not know what was waiting in his cells. This crucible is sometimes called “Iraq-Afghanistan War lung injury,” as though by giving it an unmemorable name it might just be forgotten. Joshua’s doctors called it lung cancer, Stage IV.

When he was diagnosed in November 2011, they were alarmed by how young he was, how strong and athletic, and the fact that he rarely smoked. Joshua was 31. He’d just accepted a job at Columbia College in Chicago. He had plans to start a magazine and a film company; to become a Jesuit and/or woo back his ex-girlfriend; to stage a new production of his play *Returns*; to play soccer with his nephew; to finish his Ph.D.; to go to Two Harbors, Minn., for Memorial Day.

He was 6-foot-1, 230 pounds. By the time Joshua died in New York on Aug. 25, 2012, he weighed 140 pounds.

FOR ALL THE ways that he had startled us in life—and he did—it was even stranger

to see how Joshua died. He kept being a friend. He kept teaching. Joshua's spine was crumbling and covered in tumors. Nothing worked and everything hurt. Still he tended to us, the many people he loved. In our last visit, he cracked a joke about a '90s boy band, put his hand on my full-term pregnant belly, and smiled.

He was not angry. He was grateful. Joshua said he preferred the person he'd become, having witnessed such love. Crucially, there was this: He felt "a certain sense of relief" that he "got to share in the sufferings of the Iraqis." We burned those toxins in their fields, he said, but who was talking about that? Joshua would. He would go into remission, receive healing, and do this work. That was his hope. And that was the hope of his two sisters and mother.

The June before he died, Joshua and his mother flew from Cedar Rapids to New York for treatment; they stayed in a place called Hope Lodge. There were glimpses of reprieve. For a while he was able to manage the stairs to the subway. One Thursday that August he was discharged from the hospital, and his sister Rebekah drove them to Central Park. Joshua saw people out for the evening, doing what people do, and that made him glad.

When he was readmitted, just three days later, the emergency room nurse told him he looked like her college boyfriend. "I could tell that Josh felt normal for that one moment," Rebekah recalls. But mostly those days were an agony. His arms were in such pain that his mother and sisters would take turns holding them up above his head for hours. Joshua's legs were so swollen that he could barely move them. He could not sleep. He could not think. When a nurse changed his sheets the week that he died, the movement was so excruciating that his eyes rolled back in his head. This is the rift. This is what destroys language.

At Joshua's funeral, one of his best friends spoke of how Joshua lived and died in a state of perfect trust and perfect abandonment. People began to say his name like this: Joshua Casteel, peacemaker. Joshua Casteel, ¡Presente! Joshua Casteel, pray for us. We all knew we had known a most uncommon man.

In his paper on pain, Joshua wrote that "Heidegger describes the blooming of the tree as *the calling* of 'the tree's towering.'" That description applies as well to Joshua. ■

Mia Alvarado, author of *Hey Folly* (Dos Madres Press), is editing a collection of Joshua Casteel's writing, with the working title *All Violence is Suicide*.



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BALLS THUMPED against the walls, jump ropes scraped the asphalt, and shrieks filled the air: The kindergarten and first-grade students of Holy Ghost Catholic School in Albuquerque, N.M., were at recess on a chilly December day. The sun was shining and the kids bumbled around in their jackets, oblivious to the cold. Also oblivious were the rows of leafy greens in the two raised-bed gardens just outside the classroom windows. The sun, plastic covers, and just enough water (which the students figured out after a failed crop or two) made for a perfect little garden oasis in the midst of winter.

Seeing me headed toward the gardens, dozens of children made a beeline for the structures, simultaneously shouting “Miss! Can I see?” “Miss, I’ll water them!” They helped me lift the cover to reveal a jungle of rainbow chard, kale, spinach, salad greens, a few radishes, and basil—a kaleidoscope of greens, golds, pinks, and yellows.

“Miss, can I have chard?” Mateo looked

at me hopefully, chubby fingers pointing to the rainbow chard. “Sure!” I exclaimed, gently breaking off a leaf. “If you can name it, you can taste it!” Suddenly there were 15 hands in front of me, along with a litany of names: “The pink one!” “Chard! Chard!” “Can I have that spinach?!”

Not everyone was as enthusiastic. “Yuck,” Lenaia said when I offered her a piece of spinach. “I don’t want to eat it, but I’ll water it.”

These plastic rectangular boxes had been the source of so much new life at our school—in the shape of tiny seeds carefully planted by small hands, in the hope represented by the two leaves first to sprout from the dark soil, in the gentle spray of water from the hose and the smell of damp earth, in the curiosity and fascination awakened in the students as they tended their gardens.

TWO YEARS AGO our kindergarten-to-8th-grade Catholic school was awarded a grant by the Raskob Foundation to implement an

Tim Robbets/Stone

ROOTED IN FAITH

A school garden project helps kids learn about plants—and Catholic social teaching about caring for the environment.

"Yuck,"

Lenaia said when I offered her a piece of spinach. "I don't want to eat it, but I'll water it."

environmental awareness program. Our goal was not only to *act*—build gardens, recycle, reduce, reuse—but to *educate* the students on the Catholic Church's wisdom on stewardship for creation, one of the nine principles of Catholic social teaching.

New grant in hand and eager for knowledge, I attended a local conference on the effects of climate change in the Southwest. Scientist after scientist laid out the details: Continuing low rainfall amounts, paired with unusually high temperatures, had left our region with the worst drought since recordkeeping began in 1895, resulting in withering crops, dying livestock, and dying pine forests in our mountains, which provided excellent fuel for the scores of forest fires that now burned out of control in the summer and fall. The scene was bleak and looking bleaker.

I sat limply, my fervor for implementing the environmental program at the school wilting like our chili crop that year. If I felt this way, how could I ever convey the facts and the changes we need to make to the 4- to 13-year-olds at our school? How could we educate children without making them feel defeated and hopeless?

I posed my dilemma to the panel. My question was greeted with blank stares. Crickets. Finally, one person spoke. "That's an existential question," he commented. "We do science—that's our job. We don't know the answer, either." Newly defeated, I sat down. Who would, or could, address the gravity of the issue of climate change on a *spiritual* level? It's one thing to have the necessary facts, but how do we act on them? Why should we, if there is no hope?

It took a few weeks before I put two and two together—I work with a Catholic school. As a faith community, we do existential questions.

Papal encyclicals have emphasized the interdependency of humanity and creation for a long time. Pope John Paul II directly addressed the growing ecological crisis as a moral issue. In his sermons, addresses, and writings, Pope Benedict XVI made plea after plea to the church and the world to act. Pope Francis has already spoken profusely

on environmental concerns as part of a vital component of a lived Catholic faith. The bishops of the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany, orders of women and men religious worldwide, and international Catholic institutions such as Catholic Relief Services, CAFOD, and Caritas have addressed the issue directly and repeatedly through numerous statements and programs.

Fortified by these and other resources, our school's "Care for Creation" program began Phase I in the 2012-13 school year by implementing recycling programs. Local companies reduced fees for food waste and material (plastic, paper, aluminum, cardboard, etc.) recycling, creating new partnerships and mutual benefits. We encouraged our community to reuse instead of throwing away by purchasing stainless steel water bottles and reusable grocery bags. We bought bird feeders and new plants and flowers in order to bring God's creation closer to the students.

In addition, with separate grant monies from The Catholic Foundation, we purchased prefabricated raised-bed gardens (see sidebar). We chose them because they could be situated just outside classrooms and thus fully integrated into the campus and school life. Separate covers for winter and summer to allow year-round gardening, stands to make access easy for children and adults alike, and the option of a drip system were all important factors in our choice.

Kindergarten and first-grade students led the school in planting and caring for crops. Children followed the plant cycle from seed to harvest, watering daily, keeping a record of temperatures inside the covers, and testing plant types in different conditions. The trials and errors ensured countless learning opportunities. Recess now included garden watering and sampling, and once vegetable-phobic children

delighted in being able to eat a fresh leaf of chard or spinach right out of the garden from seeds they planted. Salad parties became popular in first grade. The gardens even provided enough for children to take small baggies of greens home to share with their families.

Although last year's harvests were not enough to provide fresh greens to the local St. Vincent de Paul food pantry on campus, as we had hoped, the addition of three more gardens, plus more gardening know-how, should allow us to achieve this goal in the coming year.

Education in our Catholic faith was at the heart of all the action we had taken in the name of caring for creation. The gardens were each blessed, painted with scripture verses celebrating God's creation, and given a patron saint—San Ysidro (patron saint of gardeners) and St. Francis (patron saint of creation). We celebrated the Feast of St. Francis by hanging bird feeders and planting flowers and seeds; a rain barrel and the elementary school walls blossomed with pictures illustrating Bible verses and church teachings on creation. Older students researched environmental issues in light of church teachings, calculated their carbon footprints, and made commitments to reduce, reuse, and recycle. This two-pronged approach ensured that students were engaged in a constant cycle of education and action.

The focus of the first phase of our Care for Creation program was to teach our students about climate change from the perspective of their faith and give them tools to act upon these beliefs. In doing so, we realized even more: Our church's teaching is not compartmentalized—stewardship for creation, the right to life, human dignity, the rights of labor and workers, and so on, are not separate. The truth is that each is intimately connected to the other, and that when one principle is out of balance, the whole suffers. Thus we have learned to look at the environmental crisis as an issue connected to the

We have learned to look at the environmental crisis as an issue connected to the entire expression of our faith and our lives.

entire expression of our faith and our lives.

As we've entered Phase II in the 2013-14 school year, we have tried to use this knowledge to deepen our commitment to real change by examining the entirety of our lifestyles and choices and how these choices affect all of creation. Using the Passionist Earth and Spirit Center's Lent 4.5 program, we have begun the year with the theme of Christian simplicity. How can we simplify our lives—buy less, consume less, even schedule fewer activities—in order to prioritize what really matters: the dignity of each human person and the sanctity of all life, including all of creation? The themes of consumerism, water, and energy will round out our year, at which point the Care for Creation program will become a permanent part of the school curriculum.

LOOKING BACK on the first climate change conference I attended, I am profoundly grateful for the treasure that I stumbled upon. The richness of Catholic social teaching has given us the tools necessary to confront such an overwhelming issue. Scientists have done a wonderful job of giving us the facts. Our religious tradition gives us the holistic perspective with which to understand and act upon those facts. The church's teachings have made the critical difference for our community between knowledge/hope/action and knowledge/despair/paralysis. Our faith has lent new perspective and meaning both to the problem we confront and its solutions.

The task is enormous, and it is true that these little steps our school has taken will not, in themselves, be enough to stop possible environmental catastrophe. But we have realized that as a community of faith we have something vital and unique to offer the conversation on climate change. Behind our actions is the understanding that our faith must be reflected in every aspect of our lives. The Catholic Church and other faith communities offer the perspective, hope, and solidarity needed to confront one of the greatest moral issues of our time. ■

Michaela Bruzzese, a Sojourners contributing writer, teaches theology at St. Pius X High School and coordinates the Care for Creation program at Holy Ghost Catholic School in Albuquerque, N.M.



Gretta Valenzuela

A GARDEN TOOLBOX FOR SCHOOLS

Catholic Coalition on Climate Change
Catholicclimatecovenant.org

This site has education and worship resources tailored to different ages and settings. The "St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor" can be made by individuals or institutions to formalize their intent to change lifestyles and habits to counter climate change.

Passionist Earth and Spirit Center
www.earthandspiritcenter.org

Lent 4.5 is a seven-week spiritual formation program encouraging deeper care for creation, commitment to justice, and simple living. The discussion guide *Christian Simplicity: A Gospel Value* lifts up the same themes but is usable at any time of year.

Veggiegrower Gardens
Veggiegrower.net

This site offers raised-bed gardens made of food-grade resin (BPA-free), as well as garden stands, seeds, and resin rain barrels. Garden beds come in a variety of sizes and colors.



Getty Images



By Robert Hirschfield

GOD 'BENEATH THE ORDINARY'

The universal vision of Hasidic poet Yehoshua November.



Hasidic poet
Yehoshua November

I MEET YEHOSHUA NOVEMBER in an empty classroom in Touro College in Brooklyn, N.Y., where he teaches. The chairs and desks are piled to one side, like a barricade. We sit in a clearing beside the clutter, talking about his place as the only Hasidic poet—he is a 34-year-old member of the Lubavitch sect—on the American literary landscape, an entity ruled largely by secular academics far removed from the realities and sensibilities of ultra-orthodox Jewish observance and mysticism.

“They are the rabbis of poetry,” November laughs. He laughs so hard he doubles over in his chair. His laughter is as strange as it is infectious. Yet in all of *God’s Optimism*, his book that was short-listed for the 2010 LA Times Book Prize, there is not a single laugh line. His poems are serious, if lightly held narratives, some parable-like, most down to earth with a longing for heaven.

Illustration by Richard Tuschman



38 Net Neutrality

Danny Duncan Collum on internet freedom

41 Cowboys, Indians—and Reconciliation?

Aaron McCarroll Gallegos on Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry

44 Pax on Both Their Houses

Tom Getman on Michael Lerner's *Embracing Israel/Palestine*

*Sometimes you see them
in the dressing area
of the ritual bath,
young bearded men unbuttoning
their white shirts,
slipping out of their black trousers,
until, standing entirely naked,
they are betrayed by the tattoos
of their past life ...*

November follows them as they mingle with the “devout since birth” Hasidim. Underwater, he concludes, they look no different from the others, except that the others *probably never made a sacrifice / as endearing to God.*

The poet himself, neither a *baal teshuva* nor a born Hasid, was raised in a nomadic orthodox Jewish home. His father, a gynecologist, kept moving his three children around the country in search of the perfect Jewish school for them. I met his father once at November's house on Purim, a quasi-carnival holiday of redemption. He was in costume. *Peyos* (the sidelocks worn by some men and boys in the Orthodox community) were taped to the sides of his head. He had come dressed as his son.

In his strange double life, November finds commonality with the *baal teshuv*as.

“Hasidim would be the last audience for my poetry. They don't really get what I am trying to do in my work. They are concerned with Torah study and trying to raise their large families. [November himself has five children.] Artistic ambitions don't interest them.”

But even among fellow poets, November sometimes feels out of place and wavers in his innate openness.

“At the Association of Writers and Writing Programs conference [this year], I felt kind of like an outsider. I passed the book fair stands manned by individuals with multiple piercings, brightly dyed hair, and ripped clothing. Everyone was welcoming but surprised to have a Hasidic man in the building.”

November's interest in Hasidism began as an undergraduate at Binghamton University and crested at Pitt, where he studied with Ruth Stone in the MFA poetry program.

“I was drawn to its mysticism and its stories, its all-encompassing approach to Judaism of finding God in all things, at all

Continued on Page 39

New & Noteworthy

SPIRIT CONNECTIONS

Some Western and global South churches have established “sister church” relationships as a more mutual alternative to the old mission field approach. Drawing on fieldwork and interviews, Janel Kragt Bakker studies the give and take of this model in *Sister Churches: American Congregations and Their Partners Abroad*. Oxford

BORDER CLASHES

The documentary *The State of Arizona* captures multiple perspectives on undocumented immigration in the aftermath of Arizona's controversial Senate Bill 1070, dubbed the “show me your papers” law. Directed by Catherine Tambini and Carlos Sandoval, it will premiere on PBS's Independent Lens series on January 14 (check local listings). communitycinema.org



WATER YOUR SOUL

Walking the Disciple's Path: Eight Steps That Will Change Your Life and the World, by Linda Perrone Rooney, draws on *lectio divina* and St. Ignatius of Loyola's use of imaginative scriptural reflection to help lead readers from head to heart. Ave Maria Press

DIFFERENT TOGETHER

In *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family*, former *Newsweek* reporter Susan Katz Miller (right) writes about dual-faith families, drawing on surveys she conducted with hundreds of parents and children as well as her own experience as an interfaith child and parent. Beacon Press



“Poetry is their vision of spirituality, their own religion, and they don't want traditional religion brought in,” he says.

Even November's long, reddish beard seems delighted at their rebellion against traditional religion. An antinomian Hasid and unashamed of it.

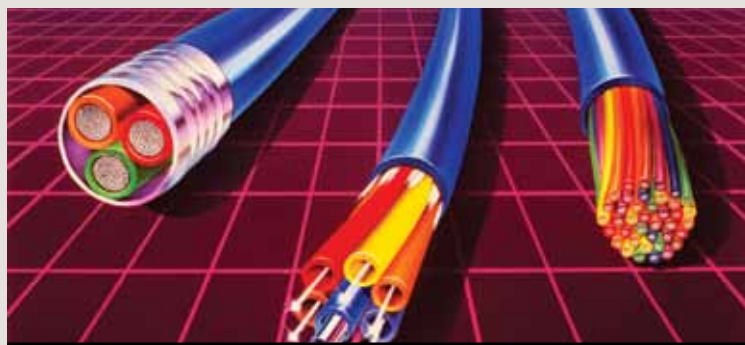
When I first read *God's Optimism*, the poem I kept going back to was “Baal Teshuv

Net Neutrality: The Final Battle?

FOR SEVERAL years now, a debate has raged over the issue of “net neutrality,” pitting media reformers, digital libertarians, and “content” companies such as Amazon and Netflix against old-school telecommunication giants such as AT&T and Comcast, with the Federal Communications Commission serving as an erratic referee.

Sometime early this year, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia may settle the question when it decides the case of Verizon vs. the FCC. If the court decides in favor of Verizon, big telecom companies will have won the right to decide what digital content we can receive, especially when it comes to video and other bandwidth-intensive media.

Simply put, the issue in the Verizon case is whether broadband internet will follow the “common carrier” precedent applied to telephone lines and the electricity grid



Andy Zito

and which will be unavailable at any price. If you want Al Jazeera instead of Fox News, too bad—it’s a take it or leave it package.

As we geezers well remember, the first internet service providers used telephone lines, which fall under the common carrier principle. But as more content moved online, the demand grew for a consumer network that could handle more data, maybe one using fiber optic cable, like the one that the television companies already had running into most U.S. homes. So the cable companies became major internet providers, and they, of course, want to operate the way they always have, by assembling a package of information and entertainment sources and telling the rest of us to like it or lump it.

In 2010, the Obama-appointed FCC issued the “Open Internet Order,” which sought to establish net neutrality as the law of the land. But the Verizon suit doesn’t just challenge the justice and logic of the net neutrality rule; it claims that Congress has never given the FCC the authority to regulate internet service providers at all. But that’s not the biggest problem for the FCC. In 2002, the Bush-appointed commission actually declared that internet service providers were not “common carriers.” The Obama FCC’s 2010 order treats them as common carriers, but it did

not rescind the Bush-era rule to the contrary.

Ultimately the problem here is that the telecom industry views the internet purely as a business. But in the U.S., the media through which political and cultural debate and exchange occur have always been treated as a public good. Our founding generation started a subsidized postal service that guaranteed cheap delivery of newspapers and magazines. When radio and then TV came along, we established the FCC to ensure that broadcasters served the public interest and set aside part of the broadcast spectrum for public and nonprofit use.

Very soon what we are still calling broadband internet will completely displace both print and broadcasting as the media through which our democracy functions. And so far, the FCC response has been muddled and spotty. We need bold action from Congress (well, maybe from the next Congress) to re-establish the primacy of the public interest in the digital sphere. If we don’t get it, the corporations and the courts will turn our free and untidy marketplace of ideas into yet another exclusive gated community. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel White Boy.

Will corporations and the courts turn our free and untidy marketplace of ideas into yet another exclusive gated community?

or the model of cable TV. The common carrier principle guarantees equal access to necessary public utilities. Applied to the internet, this has meant that service providers simply supply the fiber-optic cable or wireless spectrum, give equal access to all content providers, and charge the final recipient of the data (you and me) a fee that covers the cost of maintaining an adequate network.

In the cable TV business model, the provider controls the network of fiber optic cable and the content that goes over it. The cable company decides which channels are included in the basic package, which (like HBO) are purchased separately,

Continued from Page 37

times.” For a time, after Pitt, he fell away from poetry completely, studied in a Hasidic yeshiva in New Jersey; he even thought of becoming a rabbi before being propelled back into poetry by a rabbi with whom he was studying. The rabbi recognized poetry as November’s calling and inveighed against his betrayal of it.

I ask him about the poets he admires. They tend mostly to reside in spiritual trees,

The rabbi recognized poetry as November’s calling and inveighed against his betrayal of it.

some traditional, some not. Leonard Cohen was an early influence dating back to his college days. November has no compunctions about being influenced by a pop culture figure.

“I liked how his poems had a sense of a sacred, the mythic, even when the subject was modern love.”

Reading November’s poem “Shadows,” written for his wife, Ahuva, I am struck by how he is able, as a Hasid, to write about romantic longing with the same abandon as he does spiritual longing.

*I watched you
the way men watch women
before they have loved them,
and I sent my shadow hungrily after you,
the way some send their shadows
when their bodies
cannot go.*

November is self-effacing before two other traditionally Orthodox Jewish—though not Hasidic—poets on the literary scene, David Caplan (“David’s work is much more elliptical and complex than mine.”) and Eve Grubin (“Grubin’s work is much more imaginative than mine.”). November is reluctant to elaborate on his key role as a poet of Jewish spirituality, still a miniscule tendency in American poetry. I press him a bit, quickly realizing that for him good poetry of any kind is merely more light poured into the already lighted place of poetry itself.

“Poetry, for me,” he says at one point, “is



Kevin Costner as the crusading investigator Jim Garrison in the film *JFK*.

MISSED RECKONINGS

THE MOST common image of the assassination of President Kennedy is embedded in the collective consciousness due to the fact that it was the subject of what may be the most-seen film in history, Abraham Zapruder’s 26-second home movie, grainy and garish in color and fact. The more recent eruption of reality television may have left us nearly unshockable, but a long, hard look at Zapruder’s short, hard film is still horrifying. The most provocative context in which I’ve seen the film located is Stephen Sondheim’s meaty musical **Assassins**. The Broadway production had Neil Patrick Harris as Lee Harvey Oswald with the film projected onto his white T-shirt. That the show took place at Studio 54 served to underline the demonic bargain at the intersection of the military-industrial-circus complex: The nightclub theater location satirized the fact that our stories about killing can either critique the cultural appetite for destruction or serve to perpetuate more of it as a form of entertainment.

If *Assassins* was the most provocative screen for the Zapruder film, the most politically complex is Oliver Stone’s 1991 movie **JFK**, now being rereleased to mark the assassination anniversary. It’s one of the greatest examples of cinematic craft applied to polemic (current examples are *Captain Phillips* and *12 Years a Slave*)—edited like a dance, with a television miniseries’ worth of big name actors (Jack Lemmon, Sissy Spacek, Walter Matthau, Donald Sutherland, John Candy) in small roles holding up the edifice of big

speechifying done by Kevin Costner and Tommy Lee Jones. It’s a thrilling film, and it has intellectual substance—the point is not whether or not the conspiracy theory posited in *JFK* is true, but that human beings “sin by silence” when we should speak.

The films of Zapruder and Stone are ostensibly used to mark the martyrdom of a good king, but of course that story is more often put to the purpose of birthing new fear-mongering rituals, denying shared responsibility for civic life, obfuscating the heart of the matter that killing always makes things worse, and becoming a justification for sending more people to die.

Fifty years ago, a kind of innocence was taken, and a kind of brokenness remains unrepaired: We can watch footage of the murder of a king on YouTube any time we like, but we haven’t lamented his death or reckoned with its meaning. The Zapruder film, of course, is like the videos telegraphing the in-the-moment horror of the destruction of the Twin Towers, and we haven’t lamented or properly mourned that either. President Kennedy, flawed and hopeful, wanted to challenge the idea of “Pax Americana, forced on the world” with the notion that “our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet.” A decent memorial still awaits. ■

Gareth Higgins, a Sojourners contributing editor, is executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. He is the author of the new book Cinematic States: America in 50 Movies (Burnside Books).

a space of truth, a space to assess one's life and what is meaningful to a person. I am not trying to write about the transcendent experience but the immanent experience."

Which is to say he writes from the point of confluence between the secular and the spiritual.

It is not surprising that November regards highly Adam Zagajewski of Poland, whose contemplative voice is broad enough to encompass the historic, the religious, and the personal in his work. The only history to be found in November's poetry are his subject's undated inner journeys, or as in the poem "Climbing," an outer journey that ends up within.

*This morning,
in the small basement shul,
amidst several Chasidic students lost in
prayer,
I looked up from my siddur
to see a man in worker's clothes climb a
ladder
and enter through an open ceiling panel,
and I thought, Oh yes,
he is just another one
like all of us
trying desperately to ascend ...*

November brings up Tony Hoagland, his former teacher and polar opposite: cynical, irreligious, at times bluntly sexual. Talking about Hoagland hoists from November a giggle that stitches together the sacred and the profane. I would hope one day to read a poem of his that bottles that sound. I must go back to Martin Buber's *Tales of The Hasidim* to see if there is a precedent for such laughter in his lineage. November's laughter is reminiscent of those itinerant Buddhist monks of old who saw the antics of men in all their forms as incorrigibly risible.

As a theist, November occupies a different world entirely. A world in which God dwells and moves in silence and mystery among people, just as the poet's own poems dwell and move in silence and mystery within him.

"God as [God] really is unknowable," says November. "Poets are attuned to that. Poets are aware of something beneath the silence, something beneath the ordinary." ■

Robert Hirschfield is a New York City-based freelance writer.



Rick Reinhard

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Reviewed by Aaron McCarroll Gallegos

COWBOYS, INDIANS— AND RECONCILIATION?

Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together, edited by Steve Heinrichs. Herald Press

THE DOMINANT cultures of North America have long struggled to take responsibility for the suffering and injustice inflicted upon the Indigenous Peoples of the continent. The archetypal “us/them” story of cowboys and Indians remains at the core of North American national identities, from derogatory sports mascots and symbols such as the Washington “Redskins” and the “Chief Wahoo” character of the Cleveland Indians to the ignorant “redfacing” by non-Indigenous partygoers and trick-or-treaters in contrived Indian outfits. And this situation is nowhere near ending, despite many years of cultural sensitivity training and education.

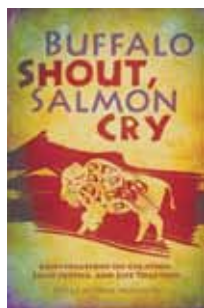
Such overt racism should never be acceptable today. Yet it persists in regard to Indigenous Peoples. Why is this? As one friend remarked to me, most modern-day Americans believe injustices done to Indigenous Peoples to be a thing of the past.

But are they? Steve Heinrichs, director of Indigenous relations for the Mennonite Church in Canada, has brought together nearly 40 theologians, activists, writers, and poets—half of whom are Indigenous—to create *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, a challenging anthology on Indigenous-Christian relations, stolen land, racism, and the impending environmental crisis that we all must face together.

Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry isn't easy reading. It's a Jonah-like warning that should unsettle us and change our perspective. And that's exactly what needs to happen. Its contributors offer a wide range of views, but agree on at least one thing: “the controlling culture is violently sick, devastating peoples and lands. The need is urgent: repent, resist, do something.”

This book shows that, far from being over, how we respond to this struggle for truth, justice, and reconciliation is key to determining who we will become as nations in the future. For the first time in many generations, we have the possibility of dialogue between the Indigenous and “settler” communities in North America that could offer unprecedented potential for healing—but it isn't going to be easy.

By retelling familiar biblical stories from an Indigenous perspective, *Buffalo Shout* uncovers insights and meaning that more traditional tellings gloss over. Such liberating



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readings flip control of the narrative from the powerful to the powerless and open our eyes to the ways our colonial heritage has limited our understanding of faith.

What does it mean for “settlers” to truly understand the legacy of colonialism, which has given everything to them only by taking it away from somebody else? Significant national processes, such as Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provide an important step, giving the nation the opportunity to hear stories from survivors about the damage done by church-run residential schools that continues to affect Indigenous communities to this day.

And how do we move from this awareness to the even more difficult task of reconciliation?

Prophetic messages such as those delivered by *Buffalo Shout* show that by first hearing the truth of injustice and then making reparations, we could come together to build the harmonious community of creation that is necessary to heal the world,

which God so loves:

*The trail we must take lies both ahead
and behind,
and uncertainty doubtless will hang like
a veil,*

*Yet hope compels us to journey ahead,
for onward to generations,
we must travel.*

*As at last it is certain—it’s all we could
know—together the road, together we
prevail.*

—Terry LeBlanc (Mi’kmaq)

Contributors to *Buffalo Shout* include several names familiar to *Sojourners* readers, such as Ched Myers, Rose Marie Berger, Brian McLaren, and Tink Tinker. There is also a helpful online study guide available for groups. ■

Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, a *Sojourners* contributing writer, manages social media for *The United Church of Canada*.

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

BROTHERS IN FAITH AND DEFIANCE

No Ordinary Men: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi, Resisters Against Hitler in Church and State, by Elisabeth Sifton and Fritz Stern. New York Review Books.

NO ORDINARY MEN: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi, *Resisters Against Hitler in Church and State* is a tightly woven story framed by the sophisticated historical analysis of its two authors, former senior Farrar, Straus, and Giroux editor Elisabeth Sifton (daughter of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr) and Columbia University professor emeritus Fritz Stern, a famed German scholar. The book profiles two brave young men—Bonhoeffer, a theologian and minister deeply involved in fighting the Nazis’ efforts to control the German Protestant churches,



Photo by: John Dauer

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and Dohnanyi, a brilliant lawyer (son of Hungarian composer Ernst Dohnanyi) working in the German Ministry of Justice, who used his key position to methodically collect evidence against the Nazi regime.

Sifton and Stern portray Dohnanyi in detail as a leader in the small but high-powered German resistance movement. Brig. Gen. Hans Oster, a resistance member, hired Dohnanyi away from the Ministry of Justice ostensibly to help run the Abwehr, a German military intelligence organization that was also the center of the anti-Hitler resistance, in 1939. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was then recruited by Dohnanyi to be part of this team. Dohnanyi's wife, Christine (Bonhoeffer's sister), is also revealed as a significant influence on and aide to her husband.

The slim, 157-page volume is an important new historical work in the growing field of research on the German resistance movement during World War II. It is a penetrating look at Dohnanyi's dangerous operations against the Nazis with historical perspective

that other books on him and Bonhoeffer lack. Earlier biographies, written mainly by church people, more or less emphasized Bonhoeffer as a singular hero fighting Hitler. Bonhoeffer was indeed very brave and traveled thousands of miles abroad while working as an agent for the Abwehr, but he was just one of a circle of resisters.

The authors are well-suited to intelligently tell this story. Stern, like Bonhoeffer, was born in Breslau, and their families—both in the medical profession—were well acquainted. Sifton's father worked tirelessly in the ecumenical church movement to inform the world what was going on in Germany during the 12 years that the Nazis held power.

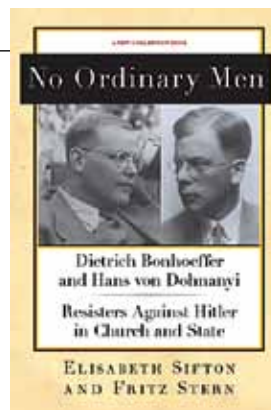
"Most members of the high professional elite ... either succumbed to the temptation of National Socialism—or clung to the illusion that in the Third Reich one could be 'unpolitical,' playing it safe," write the

authors. Bonhoeffer worked with pastor Martin Niemöller and others in 1933 to organize the Confessing Church in resistance to the Nazis. More than 2,000 pastors joined, but this was still little more than 10 percent of

Germany's Protestant ministers. Stern notes that the Protestant ministers he personally knew—Confessing Church members—"were shadowed everywhere and they knew that every sermon could land them in prison or a concentration camp."

Dohnanyi often worked closely with Bonhoeffer and other members of the Confessing Church to help those targeted by the Gestapo to flee the country. Dohnanyi also kept information on Nazi actions, known as the "Zossen Files," in a safe on an Army base 20 miles outside of Berlin. He planned to use this evidence to convict Hitler's top ministers when the war ended.

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dangerous Dohnanyi plan—dubbed “Operation 7”—involved helping 14 Jews escape deportation and death by appointing them as Abwehr agents on their way to Switzerland. Dohnanyi was also involved in two failed plots to assassinate Hitler.

Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer were arrested in April 1943. Both, separately, were interrogated for two years. Finally, an Abwehr chauffeur told the Gestapo where to find the evidence it had been seeking for years: the “Zossen Files.” Dohnanyi, the Gestapo asserted, “was the spiritual head of the conspiracy” to eliminate Hitler. In April 1945, both men were hanged, just weeks before the Third Reich ended. They were essentially two gentle, loving family men who could not close their eyes, as so many did, to the evil around them. They, and their families, paid the ultimate price for their bravery. ■

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at Business Week and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.

Reviewed by Tom Getman

PAX ON BOTH THEIR HOUSES

Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East, by Michael Lerner. North Atlantic Books.

EVERY SO OFTEN an extraordinary book appears with potential to bring change—or at least advance justice by mitigating nationalism or prejudice. Rabbi Michael Lerner’s *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East* is such a book. The appeal is clear: Be both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli and pray for the best for each.

The book is a gut-wrencher as it describes the results of cyclical violence and reaction that fuels descent into paralyzing trauma and anger for both Arabs and Israelis.

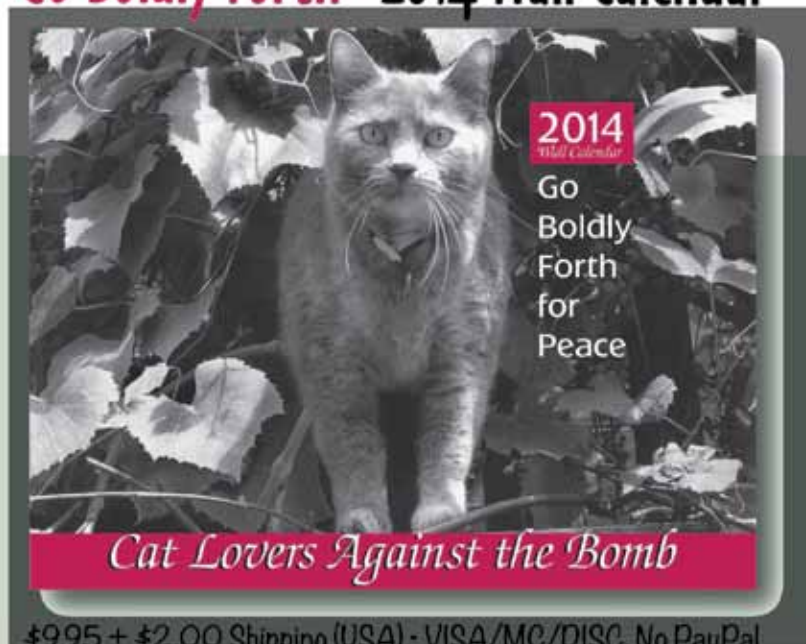
Lerner, an advocate for Middle East justice and founder of *Tikkun* magazine, speaks truth about the human-made tragedy of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. His transformative counsel about what people

and nations can do to participate positively is desperately needed. Social justice advocates have been offered a candid and honest reprise of the tragic thinking and actions of oppressed people who should have known better than to visit the same on “the other.”

Lerner’s way toward peace is grounded in many years of living in and traveling to Israel/Palestine, loving the two protagonists equally, and constantly exploring his and others’ souls. In spite of the victimizing and traumatizing of both Jews and Arabs, he remains hopeful. *Embracing* makes for a compelling and even inspiring read. I devoured most of it in two sittings, captivated by Lerner’s vision.

His recurring theme is the danger of

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depending upon “nothing but force” as the cause of monumental misunderstanding and pain. Lerner bears clear witness to the root problem, declaring that “the struggle between Israel and the Arab states, like every other part of the story, can be told persuasively from each perspective.” And each side suffers irreparably from unhealed victimhood. Reading the detailed history of each and the resulting fear-driven ghetto mentality serves to crush the spirit but for Lerner’s hopeful appeal. He contends that God’s mercy is sufficient. Options out of the long stalemate can be offered.

The European colonial powers do not escape his scathing analysis, nor do the principals’ monumental mistakes. The Abrahamic family will not be brought back from the brink without an honest facing of painful historical details and the resulting anger, fear, and ignorance. More than half of the book is a mostly objective and accurate unpacking of the often-gruesome and xenophobic history of the region.

Except for a slip or two, Lerner does not unquestioningly accept the Israeli narrative. One such possible error is calling Israeli soldiers on a mission who were brutally lynched “innocent people who wandered into Ramallah.” There are contrary reports on what happened.

Embracing calls repeatedly for compassion for both “sides.” Lerner confronts without naiveté the great difficulties to be faced and offers realistic options to the present peace “process.” If the same wrong paths are taken with the only difference being a more-vigorous commitment, it is unlikely the result will be different. Rabbi Lerner’s witness is similar to the psalmist’s declaration: “I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. The earth is filled with your love, oh Lord. Teach [us] your decrees” (119:63).

Palestinians, Israelis, and their sympathizers and supporters can contribute to the possibility of transcendent breakthrough. He declares, “sometimes the only true ‘realistic’ position is precisely to be prophetic and utopian in both Palestinian and Zionist communities” where past errors, flawed leadership, and “downright traitor talk”



must be confessed.

It is worth owning *Embracing* for its extensive appendix of Israeli and U.S. organizations and other resources for peace. Lerner offers those flagging in hope much needed reminders of faithfulness and a vision of

what we can accomplish if we are freed from our imprisoning narratives. The result could be a multi-narrative, generous understanding similar to that compassion experienced in South Africa and Ireland with the potential for truth and reconciliation.

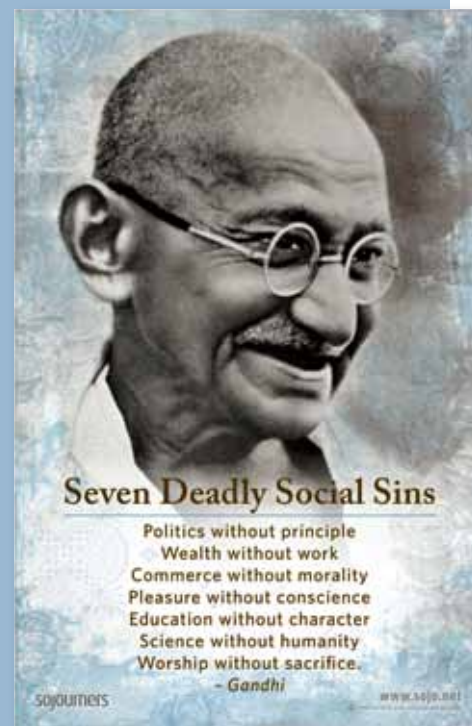
Lerner posits that this could lead to similar historical surprises and unexpected “miracles.” So one hopes. ■

Tom Getman, a Sojourners board member, served with World Vision for 25 years, including five years as national director in Jerusalem.

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The Miracle of Christmas Bread

THURSDAY NIGHT is baking night at Panadería El Latino on 11th Street. Early Friday morning, the bakers pull their weekend supply of *pan dulce* from the ovens. Racks and racks of *conchas*, *cuernos*, and *galletas*—in eye-popping yellows and pinks—are set out to cool. The entire street is redolent with yeast, cinnamon, and sugar.

From the outside this bakery looks like any another boarded-up building. “The only indication this isn’t a crack den,” one local points out, “is the overwhelmingly delicious smell of baked goods.” El Latino distributes to corner *bodegas* across the metro D.C. area. But, if you brave the exterior, you can get three sweet rolls for a buck. Bread of heaven!

Extending our tables to feed the multitudes is a practice Jesus asks us to imitate (Matthew 14:16). When Jesus hosted that feast for “more than 5,000” with “only five loaves and two fish,” it was called a miracle. But the mystery wasn’t in magic math. Rather this is a tale of two parties. In Matthew 14:13-21, the dilemma



McKinley/Flickr

neither understand the enormity of the problem nor the blasphemy inherent in the system.

“Send the crowds away,” they say, “so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves” (14:15). The disciples still believe the “market system” will solve the problem.

According to New Testament scholar Warren Carter, at the time “the emperor, and through him various gods, [was] responsible for blessing the empire with adequate food.” Ceres, the goddess of grain, showed her approval of the Roman emperor by providing good grain harvests. But, as Juvenal contemptuously reminds, the government is trading cheap white bread for actual political power and distracting the people with “circuses.”

Jesus’ retort to his followers is categorical: “*You* give them something to eat.”

Jesus acts as host to a Great Picnic. The disciples are taught how to serve. Jesus makes them practice extending the table, sharing the bread (14:18-19), rather than doing it for them. Bread for all, Jesus proclaims! It is God’s will that hungry people be fed—but with a bread that satisfies.

The Christmas season is a time for feasting and

celebrating. An English custom holds that a loaf of bread baked on Christmas Eve will cure the sick and heal the broken-hearted. An Orthodox table tradition requires the communal sharing of bread and honey. First, the host dips a small piece of Christmas *krendel* in honey and salt, then approaches each dinner guest, starting with the eldest. “Christ is born,” she says. “Let us adore him,” responds the guest.

“Food sustains and enriches our life and cultures,” writes Ched Myers, “yet when there is too little or too much of it, desperation or greed follow. Food brings people together, but also divides them. Table fellowship (with whom, and how, and what we eat) mirrors the inclusions and exclusions of the wider society.”

This Christmas, let’s fill our tables with simple foods. Set up extra chairs. Welcome the unexpected guest. Invite the stranger. Remind one another that Christ is born! And, when our bread is blessed and broken, call to mind Jesus’ mandate to all disciples: “*You* give them something to eat.” ■

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Who Killed Donte Manning?* (available at store.sojournal.net), is a Catholic peace activist and a Sojourners senior associate editor.



“Food brings people together.”

was that there was too little food and too many people. But in the preceding verses, there was too much food and too little *humanity*.

Matthew 14:1-12 tells the story of Herod’s birthday party. Here, only the upper 1 percent, the elite and powerful, are gathered in a setting overflowing with the rarest wines, mountains of meat, and the finest breads. But Herodias’ daughter demands a different dish. The main course is served to her on a platter: It is the head of John the Baptist.

These are the two “feedings” that Matthew juxtaposes. In Jesus’ time, the economic 99 percent are abused by a market system controlled by an unaccountable power. The disciples



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Short Takes

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR...



Sister Jean Lait
prepares pies for
a Thanksgiving meal.

CSF photo

Sister Jean Lait, CSF

Bio: Sister Jean Lait, CSF, is an Anglican Franciscan sister based in San Francisco who protests drones and their effects on children.

Website: communitystfrancis.org

1 Why did you decide to stand up against drones? During WWII, I experienced the bombing of Coventry in England. As a child of 9 years, I slept under the stairs, anxiously waiting for the bombs to drop. Toward the end of the war, flying bombs known as "doodle-bugs" were used. These were very similar to drones and were sent from Germany. They were aimed anywhere. These were bombs where you heard a whistle and then it was silent before the bang.

Thinking back on the fear and anxiety I experienced, the whole idea of drone warfare is just immoral to me. No child should ever be that frightened. No child should have to live in a war zone. That kind of trauma affects you, one way or another. You either use that experience for good or otherwise.

2 What do you and your community do to protest drones? My order is committed to peace and justice. At one time, my community and I would be out there marching in the streets and protesting. But as one gets older, there are other ways of speaking out against injustice. I'm in my 80s, so the best thing I can

do is just be myself and share my story in hopes that it brings awareness to the horrors of drones.

3 After all that you've witnessed in your lifetime, where do you find hope? The fact that young people are concerned about social issues such as poverty and world peace is one thing that gives me hope. I also find hope in this new wave of faith that seems to be emerging. People are speaking out more about their faith and how it informs their views on peace and justice. And my own personal experience of being a sister—living a simple life and a life of prayer—gives me hope, too.

4 Any final thoughts for our readers regarding drones? Something being sent off from somewhere else to destroy homes and lives is just abhorrent to me. The fact that Americans are using drones is such a tremendous disappointment. I always thought the U.S. was leading the way in peace, justice, and democracy, but we just got caught up using these methods. It's horrific.

—Interview by Elaina Ramsey

Moving into Epiphany's Light

A NEW CALENDAR YEAR marks the end of the Christmas season and a shift to the season of Epiphany that spotlights the reality of the Incarnation. In sync with our personal promises to discontinue bad habits in favor of better practices, the lectionary readings capture familiar expressions of vocational clarity and ministerial frustration. The season is a mosaic of self-examination peppered with moments of great light penetrating the darkest despair. Whether ancient Israel (living in exile in the sixth century B.C.E.), the followers of Jesus (in the first century C.E.), or 21st century seekers of spirituality without religion, the description is the same: The disenfranchised, disappointed, and divided discover a glimpse of the reign of God.

Read these texts as snippets of ancient social media: status updates of a prophet, blogs about the ministry of Jesus, and PDF files about early church practices. Each exposes the light of God pushing into the darkness of human existence: frustrated ministers, radical promises of forgiveness, reports of flourishing charismatic leaders, stalemated efforts due to divided affiliations, petitions for lawmakers to practice impartiality, and the death of one imprisoned on suspicious testimony. Familiar, jarring, and too often tamed, these texts deserve at least the attention afforded public policy debates and celebrity rumors.

A close reading of the text does not lend safety by avoiding the prophet, ignoring John's message, or disputing baptism rituals. Every baptized believer is called to arise and live as if the kingdom of God has come.

Joy J. Moore is associate dean for African-American church studies and assistant professor of preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary in California.



[JANUARY 5]

Reconciling Differences

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

LEAVING ASIDE behind-the-text editorial arguments regarding this triple-issue documentary, the opening of Isaiah 60 provides more than a backdrop for the arrival of wise men who almost fall victim to the scheme of a wicked king. In turbulent times of political posturing, economic con-

The scandal is that God intrudes into the despair.

straints, and social disruptions, the words of the prophet Isaiah penetrate a gloomy present with a glorious pronouncement. Addressed to an audience divided between those exiled to Babylon who returned to Jerusalem and those who remained in the land through its devastation, each looks for signs of the divine deliverance previously promised. The conflict between the sixth century B.C.E. exiles almost foreshadows present-day disputes between professional politicians and newly elected idealists

committed to reform and change. As it (again) becomes evident that the path to national health and prosperity will not easily be made smooth, lingering with verses may raise the volume on the yet-to-come tone of the announcement.

As such, the prayer of the psalmist seems appropriate for a people who seek that their practices demonstrate the glorious presence of God. Notice the prayers are not for a particular leader, but for whomever holds the position. Respecting the office and its authority, the people of God pray for the success of the king. As king, the leader warrants the prayer support of the people who petition for the spirit of God to enable their success as one who champions the cause of the poor, provides opportunities for the needy, and thwarts the efforts of those who oppress. As Miroslav Volf reminds us: "The advent of light into the darkness of the world is not the goal; it is part of the *movement* toward the goal" (emphasis added).

Against this background, the ministry of

Paul among the Gentiles becomes evidence of the reconciliation possible when God's redemptive plan is unveiled.

[JANUARY 12]

Surprises from the Frontline

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

ACTION OCCURS before words in Matthew's gospel. You may be surprised to notice this. Before the powerful Sermon on the Mount, Jesus acts (Matthew 4:23). So when we finally hear the voice claiming Jesus as "son," it confirms acts of obedience that have pleased God. Offer such a surprise to your audience when rehearsing this familiar exchange between John and Jesus. Draw their attention to the justice to come more than the confusion of the moment.

Actions also ignite protest. Jesus comes to John, and John's *protest* acknowledges that he recognizes Jesus' power. Is this the presence of the reconciling power of God: The one described in Isaiah as merciful, just, and unrelenting, who brings liberation? Such practices have been abandoned in churches that count the number of baptisms—rather than the transformation of the community—as the sign of success. The act of being baptized enables the fulfillment of all righteousness.

Peter's sermon testifies to the good that Jesus did as evidence that the spirit of God was upon him. To call for practices after baptism requires self-examination before baptism. Does one join the fellowship of a local congregation or the work of the Holy Spirit? A transformed community knows the work of the Holy Spirit, recognizing that God does not segregate between people. Everyone who worships Jesus, including immigrants from other nations, belongs to the community. Hak Joon Lee, in his book *The Great World House*, describes Martin Luther King Jr.'s coalition-building as including "local grassroots people, civil rights groups, diverse religious groups, peace activists, labor unions, progressive intellectuals, and Quaker pacifists." If locally and globally those who claim to be Christian act across dividing lines of political party, national

origin, and economic class, then the wider world might protest. Or maybe, in surprise, they will sum it up, as N. T. Wright does: "The revolutionary new world ... has its frontline outposts in those who in baptism have shared [Jesus'] death and resurrection."

[JANUARY 19]

Content With Our Vocation?

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11;
1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

MANY NEWS OUTLETS, and not a few churches, will draw attention to the life of Martin Luther King Jr. during this week marking his 85th birthday. My own United Methodist denomination acknowledges Human Relations Day as a way to highlight ministries that recognize the right of all God's children to realize their potential. This potential does not mean impatient claims to the rights of American individualism, wealth, and an Ivy League education. The

Does one join the fellowship of a local congregation or the work of the Holy Spirit?

potential is to be a reconciled community.

The prophet Isaiah's clarity of call did not immediately result in contentment with his vocation. He deemed this work irrelevant and ordinary until asked if the task of God is too small a responsibility (49:6). Can the contemporary church accept her potential to release the captive if it means undermining the system of mass incarceration of black and brown bodies? Does God call us to understand the plight of undocumented residents?

Biblical scholar Paul Hanson cautions against debating the identity of the Suffering Servant. He instead reminds us that the servant is multivalent in meaning to suggest both the individual and the community. Whether one sits in the pulpit or the pew, considers their personal calling or examines the responsibility of the congregation, we should never question if the church is relevant to the world. Like the Christians in Corinth, we are set apart from

a disenfranchised, disappointed, and divided society to be a community that invites others to call on the name of Jesus.

John's testimony about Jesus invited others to seek Jesus for themselves. To be Christ-like, we must not claim that our potential is economic classism, academic elitism, or personal fitness, but rather the patience of sharing with others whose insecure steps need guiding to the rock.

[JANUARY 26]

Scandalous Justice for All

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9;
1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

THESE READINGS would leave a trail of scandal if practiced by the people of God today. They call for uncommon practices of reconciliation, radical acts that cannot be confused with sanctimonious language of acceptance, but rather are genuine practices of justice extended to all.

The growth of John's ministry is met with his wrongful imprisonment and subsequent death. Jesus is not afraid to continue the call for repentance that John preached. Only, as John indicated, the power of Jesus would be evidence in the in-breaking of the reign of God. The scandal is that God intrudes into the despair, interrupting the darkness.

Rather than lament on the effects of the darkness, Jesus labored to usher in the light. Against the gloom of disease, Jesus shines the cure of health. Against the darkness of ignorance, Jesus ignites the hearts and minds of listeners by teaching them. So, too, does Paul, pulling down the walls of division that today might look like denominations, political parties, or the zip code of one's residence. Can a Christian accept her potential to restore creation in light of climate change? Does God call us to understand the plight of undocumented residents? If the world thinks this is scandalous, then not to do it is scandalous to the reign of God. ■

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Getting Real for the New Year

THIS IS OUR first issue of the new year, and with the new year comes new challenges, new hopes, and new promises which, in order of appearance, you may not live up to, will probably fail to realize, and may never keep. Fortunately, this January issue comes out in early December, several weeks before most self-delusions begin to surface, so there's still time to change them all, thus saving face. And here in Washington, D.C., saving face is very important. Living up to challenges, not so much. But saving face? We understand.

So let's get started with turning your future failures into successes and your future frowns into smiles, which are just frowns turned upside down, depending on whether you're standing on your head at the time.

The point is, you don't have to make the same mistakes again this year, because we can stop your resolutions before you make them. We can nip failure in the bud, because failure is just eruliaf turned upside down. Or possibly backward. Regardless, following is a short list

Don't make promises you can't keep.

of things you may have pledged to do this year. Think again.

Lose weight. Right. Sure. Whatever. Not going to happen. So stand up straight and hold your stomach in until your friends walk by. Then breathe. And remember: You're not too fat. You're just too short.

Stop reading tabloids at the checkout counter. Maybe this is the year you finally pick up *Prevention* magazine instead, even though the people in the pictures look physically, mentally, and spiritually better than you. But don't do it. Put it back on the rack, next to the gum named after nuclear submarines and galactic anomalies. Because *Prevention*



just doesn't offer the important news you need: namely, that celebrities are worse off than you. So open up the *Enquirer* and see how aging film stars look on the beach. There. Don't you feel better now?

Sign up for Obamacare. You've tried, honestly you have. And you intend to again this year. But the website just isn't as much fun as watching, well, anything on YouTube. But don't worry about it. Eventually Obamacare will contact you, maybe with a nice note from the IRS.

Start tapping Angela Merkel's cellphone again. You know you want to. And you've certainly missed listening in on Europe's most powerful woman, even though the majority of conversations were extremely unclassified. You listened closely for Germany's stance on Iran sanctions, but all you heard were complaints about her husband's cooking. (This guy really likes schnitzel.) And then you stopped when you got caught, didn't you? So let's keep it that way.

Be a Somali pirate. Granted, who wouldn't want to ride in a speeding boat while waving an assault rifle in a threatening manner? It's probably a good look for you. But now, if you try to board a commercial vessel with ill intent, the crew could

broadcast Britney Spears songs at you. Real loud.

Seriously. And apparently it's working. British shipping officials report that songs like "Hit Me Baby One More Time" not only offend the religious sensibilities of Muslim pirates, but they also remind them that Ms. Spears had 20 songs on Billboard's Top 100 and they've only heard the first one. So they turn around. (Everyone knew that Britney's music was offensive—on so many levels—but who knew it could be weaponized?) So this year, if you really want to be a pirate, wave an assault rifle over your head in the privacy of your own home. You can pretend that whoever is taking a bath is actually in a container ship traversing dangerous waters. Then you can order them to "come about," which is a nautical term for "make sure you clean the hair out of the drain."

Lock in Las Vegas for the 2016 GOP convention. Probably not your call, but somebody out there is seriously thinking about it, and the Vegas Chamber of Commerce has launched a major campaign to that end. But consider this: What would you get if you combined the party of family values with the values of a 24-hour party? In chronological order:

- Lots of selfies from Republican leaders having too much fun with their cellphones.
- Heartfelt apologies on Twitter, ghost-written by aides (because Republican leaders are still having too much fun).

So think again about that Sin City convention. Because these days, what happens in Vegas only actually stays in Vegas when the internet shuts down for the evening. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.



Brandon Hook

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